THE DOCTOR OF THE RUNGAPORE

BY ROSS GORDON

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THE

DOCTOR OF THE RUNGAPORE

A TALE OF TO-DAY

BY

ROSS GORDON

LONDON
FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.
BEDFORD STREET, STRAND

TO

MY FRIEND AND COMPANION

IN SUNSHINE AND CLOUD

E. E. M.

THIS STORY IS DEDICATED.

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	WESTWARD HO!	1
II.	GERTRUDE MAINWARING	6
III.	RUFFLED FEATHERS	11
IV.	FAMILY JARS	17
V.	AN EXPLOSION	23
VI.	FRIENDS IN NEED	26
VII.	"OLD COX"	30
VIII.	THE TENOR NOT UP TO TIME	37
IX.	THE FUR MAN	45
X.	ROUGH SYMPATHY	48
XI.	OSTRICH FEATHERS	52
XII.	THE FUR CAP IN DANGER	58
XIII.	NON-PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONS	62
XIV.	FORTY THOUSAND POUNDS	67
XV.	"VERY SUDDEN"	72

CHAP.		PAGE
XVI.	THE DOCTOR SENT FOR UNPROFESSIONALLY	78
XVII.	THE BODY TO THE DEEP	81
XVIII.	THE ACCUSATION	88
XIX.	THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL	96
XX.	DOCTOR MASTERS PLAYS HIS ACE	99
XXI.	MAJOR DARRELL'S ADVICE	104
XXII.	LADY DARTMOOR'S CHARMING IDEA	110
XXIII.	RACHEL MARTIN	119
XXIV.	A PARTING AND A MEETING	126
XXV.	A CRASH	133
XXVI.	WAS IT MURDER?	142
XXVII.	BESIDE THE DEAD	151
XXVIII.	ASHLEIGH MAINWARING'S EARLY LIFE	158
XXIX.	MAJOR DARRELL'S NARRATIVE RESUMED	164
XXX.	MAJOR DARRELL MAKES HIS BOW	167

INTRODUCTION.

You are indebted, my readers, for this tale—such as it is—to the oracular remark of a friend of mine—a lonely friend, whom I was visiting on a lonely Yorkshire Moor, one dreary winter.

The wind was howling in the chimneys, and the snow drifting up against the window-panes, and my friend sat reading the *Nineteenth Century*, through a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, when a sigh escaped me, and I said hopelessly, "I wish I knew what to do with myself! Life seems very melancholy up here! How *can* you stand it?" The *Nineteenth Century* went down, and fixing a pair of large grey eyes upon me, over the gold-rimmed magnifiers, my friend said solemnly—"Write a book."

Supposing this to be said ironically, I laughed, for the first time for two days; but the *Nineteenth Century* had gone up again, and my friend's face was as grave as any judge's.

Another evening came. The weather remained un-

changed. My friend sat in the same chair, on the same spot, and read the same book through the same inevitable spectacles!

In such an awful situation, something *had* to be done. I took my friend's advice, in sheer desperation, and began to write—actually to write something besides letters.

I had no fixed plot or plan at starting. My pen went its own way, and I was amazed to find the characters and situations presenting themselves one after another, and falling quite naturally into their proper places. They *would* come, whether I liked it or not; and to write down their names and speeches became a matter of necessity. True, I had travelled much, had seen strange sights and heard strange stories, which may have quickened my imagination.

Not one of the characters is from life; although there may be, in some of them, some slight family likeness, some faint traits of resemblance to real people. The others are entirely imaginary.

The life on board ship is from memory; but the steamer is but the stage, on which my characters popped up, quite unasked and unexpectedly. Having come, they were welcome. I was glad to see them, and have done my best to make the most of them. Some of them, alas! *would* die before I intended or wished them to do so, while others lived on in spite of me!

There must be other authors who know what it is to be bullied by the children of their imagination.

R. G.

THE DOCTOR OF THE RUNGAPORE.

CHAPTER I.

WESTWARD HO!

(*Major Darrell's Narrative*).

"CAPTAIN, let me introduce you to Miss Mainwaring, a friend of mine, going home alone. I shall feel much obliged if you will consider her under your care."

The captain bowed, and raising his cap to a tall graceful girl, made a suitable reply, undertaking the charge as if it were a matter of everyday occurrence, which, indeed, it was.

We were about to leave the "Insular and Asiatic" Company's Wharf at Calcutta. Our ship, the *Rungapore*, was one of the Company's finest vessels. All was confusion and bustle on deck, and in the midst leave-takings and painful partings were going on, as a spectator of which I felt thankful that I, personally, was leaving nothing behind to regret, nor had I any of my friends to see me off. Looking on at the scenes before

me, however, I confess to feeling uncomfortable, with a choking sensation in my throat, which no amount of coughing seemed to relieve. It is not exactly *jolly* to see women cry and men turn pale, as the bell rings to warn passengers that "time is up," and that their friends, who, in some instances, are husbands or fathers, parting, perhaps, with all that makes home happy, must leave the ship.

I thought it a good opportunity to go below and take a brandy and soda, to help me to forget the anguish of my fellow-creatures on deck, if possible; I had seen enough to affect my own spirits, and decided that a "peg" might make me take a more cheerful view of life.

Oh, for a pipe, too! But that must not be thought of unless I smoked on deck; and until we were well under way, I objected to going up again.

After doing my best to cheer the inner man, I remembered that I had not yet seen my cabin, though I knew the number of my berth. I soon learned from a steward that to find it I must go nearly to the other end of the ship, and that it was on the starboard side.

Our cabin, I should have said, for I found I was not the only proprietor, but was doomed to the companionship of two other men, represented at present only by their luggage, which was scattered in all directions.

Having established myself, and made confusion worse confounded by the addition of my own traps, and knowing, from the motion of the ship, that we were

really off, I made my way on deck again, to take a last look at Calcutta, lying all aglow, as if it were actually red hot, under the vertical sun. Not that I regretted India. Far from that. But just to show that I had no ill-feeling for a country, which, after all, provided me with bread and cheese.

In stepping from the companion I knocked up against one of the officers of the ship.

"Beg pardon," said I; "I did not see you."

"Nor I you. There is such a crowd, one cannot keep clear—I never saw so many people at this time of year. It is rather late for a full ship."

"And we meet the China and Australian mails at Galle, do we not?"

"You must ask the purser that—I am the doctor of the ship, and so am not well up in those matters. When we *do* meet those mails, it's the very devil for everybody."

"Yes, it must give you more to do, I dare say."

"Well it does not so much affect me personally, at least, not much beyond it's being a nuisance to have such a crowded ship. Now the purser is to be pitied; it gives him no end of extra work."

"You must see a good deal of human nature during these voyages," I remarked. "I have only been on board an hour or so, and I feel as though I had become intimate with more than one novel in real life. Look at that woman over there—broken-hearted to leave her husband behind, while he, as soon as the *Rungapore* is out of

sight, will, no doubt, console himself at his club, and wind up the evening with billiards and a cigar, forgetting that less than twelve hours ago he parted from a true and loving wife, who will fret and pine till her lord comes home to her. We don't understand these women as we should, I believe, doctor."

"I daresay you are struck with all these leave-takings and touching adieux; I used to be, but one gets rather hardened to it all, and you would get so, too, if you saw the inconsolable lady of to-day carrying on a serious flirtation, this day week, with some new acquaintance. I have often thought how very inconvenient it would be if some of the husbands were to meet us unexpectedly half-way home! Yes, one sees a good deal of life on board these ships—and of both sides of it!"

The doctor's manner was so unlike the men of his class with whom I had come in contact before, that he rather impressed me, though on so short an acquaintance. Doctor in the Insular and Asiatic Company's service conveys at once, to my mind, either a noisy and somewhat underbred youngster, constantly whistling popular airs, and swaggering about the ship, anxious to show his own importance on board, or else an elderly and rather seedy-looking man, seldom seen—silent even at meals, retiring as soon as dinner is over to his own nook, where he can smoke his pipe unmolested, and bemoan his fate, which must be a trying and monotonous one to a man after the prime of life is past.

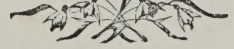
Our doctor answered to neither of these descriptions,

and I asked myself the question, "How comes he here?" He was a perfect gentleman, so far as one could judge by outward appearances. He was about thirty-five or six, with rather a military bearing, broad shoulders, fine figure, and a decidedly handsome face. Besides this, he had an easy, well-bred manner of speaking, and looked altogether a fine advertisement of the Company whose uniform he wore.

The impression given was, that he had donned this costume for jest's sake, not that he was, indeed, the ordinary apothecary, administering to sea-sickness and other disagreeable and common-place infirmities. He had the air of being slightly bored, and sometimes an expression came over his face which, for the time, altered my opinion of his good looks; but it seldom lasted longer than the thought in my mind, and both vanished when he spoke.

We smoked our pipes together, and I left him to stroll about the deck wading among children and their Ayahs —chairs of all shapes and sizes getting into my way at every turn.

Having nearly killed a small boy, who ran up against my legs, I retreated from the mother's mute malediction into private life, and perched myself at the stern of the vessel, away from the busy hum, but painfully near the screw.



CHAPTER II.

GERTRUDE MAINWARING.

We had reached Madras and left it again—our numbers increased by about twenty passengers—before I again saw the tall girl whose introduction to the captain I had witnessed on leaving Calcutta.

As we steamed away—the parched and leafless shore of Madras still visible as a white line upon the horizon—Miss Mainwaring, whose name I had caught and remembered, made her appearance on deck, just in the half-hour before dinner when it is clear of ladies, who are below, contending for a turn at the looking-glass, in preparation for the great event of the day. After her came a woman—the stewardess—laden with pillows, who, choosing out a long bamboo chair, arranged them in a way—punching them with her fists, as though they had been made of feathers, instead of the hardest horsehair, as I, by bitter experience know, they were.

"That will do—that will do," said Miss Mainwaring,

throwing herself languidly amongst them, and arranging a shawl about her feet.

"You'll try and eat some dinner now, miss, if you please. All my ladies is gone to table to-day but three, which, through having servants as is no use, or not having servants at all, is obliged to mind their own children when they ought to be at table, poor souls. Now there's Mrs. Richards, No. 92, on the port side, with three young hinfants as can't get her meals through having of no servant with her, poor lady. She says to me, 'I'm sorry to trouble you, Mrs. McGrab, but you shan't be a loser if you'll just fetch me my meals up on deck.'—Then there's No. 65, hawful delicate and no 'usband with her, and the troublesomest boy of four, and a baby and the Ayah no good at all to her as can't stand the sea and been flat on her back ever since we started. 'Mrs. McGrab,' says she, 'if I'd only a knowed how kind you'd have been, I should never have brought her, for you are quite as good as one's own nurse and maid put together, which you shall not suffer for it when we gets to Southampton.'"

Mrs. McGrab's stream of eloquence flowed like water from a tap, and only stopped when she grew breathless. "I mustn't stand talking here," she continued; "what did you say you would have for your dinner, miss?"

"If you will just leave me now, and bring me some tea and a biscuit later in the evening, I shall want nothing more—don't let me keep you pray," said Miss Mainwaring, who seemed impatient to get rid of the women's chatter.

Left alone, she turned her face towards what little breeze was stirring, and shut her eyes wearily. I had a good view of her features, and saw that she was a girl by no means ordinary in appearance—nor, as I afterwards found out, in character.

I was not the only person whose eyes were turned towards that chair and its occupant. I will try and describe her.

The outline of the features was almost perfect—if any fault could be found there, it was that her forehead was a little low; but the brows made up for the defect, and the long dark lashes, resting now on her pale cheeks promised fine eyes beneath. A straight well-cut nose, a mouth somewhat scornful perhaps, with scarlet lips, and a pretty round chin, completed a lovely picture.

As she lay there, too ill, seemingly, to care who criticized her, there was a pained expression on her handsome face—distress, I thought, more of mind than body.

She opened her eyes, languid now, but full of latent emotions—eyes able to soften with love or blaze with scorn, they seemed. Presently they flashed with something like fire, as she glanced round at those who, like myself, were looking at her somewhat too curiously. Her cheek flushed rosy red, as she became conscious of being observed.

Turning herself in her chair, with her back to us, she drew from her pocket a letter and began to read.

The breeze was blowing her wavy brown hair across

her forehead. There was no attempt at neatness about her head, or any part of her dress. She appeared to care nothing for her personal appearance, and her own sex would have pronounced her untidy. To my eyes the untidyness added to her peculiar beauty.

By-and-by, the wind carried away part of the letter she was reading, and it fluttered towards where I was sitting, book in hand, under pretence of reading; but in reality, with eyes lifted above it, still upon the bamboo chair.

"My letter—my letter!" she exclaimed.

I caught it just in time to prevent it being wafted across the sea. Restoring it to her, I bowed and made some remark about the weather in general—in which no change of any kind had taken place for days; still wishing to make Miss Mainwaring's acquaintance.

"You have been ill, I fear. I have not seen you on deck since the day we sailed. Surely the sea cannot affect you, when as calm as it is to-day."

"On the contrary, I should like nothing better than a good gale; but how is it you know that I have not been on deck since we started?" she asked.

"You were close to me when your friend introduced you to the captain. I could not help noticing you, and have not seen you since. I hope I have not offended you."

"Oh, no! Not at all. Thank you for picking up my letter. I hear the bell for dinner: I shall be *so* glad when I am quiet, and all these people go below."

I took the hint—a rather broad one, I thought—and left her abruptly.

During dinner, I could not help thinking of Miss Mainwaring—her strange manner—her almost rude words.

It was impossible to feel anger; disappointed, though, I *did* feel, at being snubbed by a handsome girl, in the hearing too, of some of our fellow passengers.

"A strange creature," I thought; "very unlike most women both in character and appearance."

CHAPTER III.

RUFFLED FEATHERS.

DINNER on board an I. and A. steamer is a long business, and the most serious event of the day. How such a meal, comprising, as it does, about a dozen different courses, ever gets cooked at all (considering the number of mouths to feed and the inconveniences which the unhappy cooks must have to contend with in preparing it) is a marvel; and yet ungrateful, discontented passengers growl and complain in loud tones, and under the very nose of the ship's captain.

"Did your father ever give you such a dinner, sir?" was once asked of a young ensign by his colonel, who was disgusted at the airs the boy gave himself at mess; and I often feel inclined to put the same question to young fellows, who sat near me at table, complaining without reasonable cause of everything they ate and drank.

My seat was on the captain's left, but between him and myself sat a Colonel Grant and his daughter. On

the other side of the table, and next to the captain, was a vacant seat, which I found was reserved for Miss Mainwaring.

There was a second long table, running, as did ours, the whole length of the saloon. At the head of it sat Dr. Masters, and therefore close to us. He certainly looked a fine fellow, and was laughing and conversing with a stout lady, fair, and quite forty, whose husband, small and double her own age, was sitting between the doctor and herself, and never opened his mouth, except to put something into it.

The tables were not by any means full; but the captain informed me that as soon as the Australian and China passengers came on board at Galle there would scarcely be a place empty.

He was a genial, pleasant man, the captain—a thorough sailor, but not rough for all that. He talked cheerily to those around him, and had a merry laugh of his own. His manner changed entirely on deck, where he gave his orders in a thorough sailor fashion, which sent officers and men flying. They liked him none the less, I found, and one youngster informed me that he hoped he might never sail with a worse "skipper."

During dinner the woman whom I had seen attending upon Miss Mainwaring came to our table to ask for some fruit and other good things "for a sick lady." I had noticed her doing the same thing at almost every meal, and was rather surprised to see how

many oranges, nuts, cakes, &c., "a sick lady" seemed equal to.

Before the voyage was over I strongly suspected who the "sick lady" was.

The captain, calling the woman to him, asked how Miss Mainwaring was.

"Well, sir, I've got her on deck, poor dear soul. She has been terrible bad to be sure. I can't get her to eat or drink. She seems low in her spirits and feels strange like."

"Give her the captain's compliments and ask her to try this champagne. It will do her good."

In a short time the woman returned, with Miss Mainwaring's compliments, but she never drank champagne. Mrs. McGrab, while returning the bottle, looked so fondly at it as to give me the impression that *she* (Mrs. McGrab) *did*.

"Is the young lady ill?" I ventured to ask.

"Why, yes; and she seems to feel her loneliness, and keeps her own cabin, partly, as I believe, because she shrinks from the crowd on deck, and partly because she is not strong. I cannot get her to come to table, though I have sent her requests that she will try to do so."

"You have an enviable charge, captain," said Colonel Grant; "doosed fine girl."

"Such charges are generally an anxiety before the voyage is over, I can tell you. First there are the tender inquiries after their health, and then there are the love affairs. By Jove! it is a heavy responsibility

when the lady has more than one string to her bow, as is generally the case. You can understand now how it is I am becoming prematurely grey," added the captain, laughing.

"There seems little ch ance of Miss Mainwaring being *that* sort of young lady," I said. "She seems to wish to make no acquaintances."

"Wait a little, my good sir—we are hardly off yet. Her health and spirits will improve—When that is the case with young ladies they must be amused, and to be amused they must flirt. What else can they do on a long voyage? Ha! ha! ha! We shall see by the time we get to—say Aden—if there are not some little affairs of the kind on hand."

He rose from table, and I followed, and joined the string of people taking their after-dinner stroll on deck.

I passed Miss Mainwaring's chair several times in my walk. She was sitting up now, and had more colour in her cheeks. Her hair had escaped from the careless knot which had before confined it. Her lady friends would have said she looked more untidy than ever; *I* say she looked more beautiful.

Seated by her side was Dr. Masters, who appeared to be paying her a professional visit—she scarcely noticing his presence, and answering him with languid indifference.

Presently she rose, and as I slowly sauntered past, I caught these words, uttered scornfully, but in a clear and musical voice :—

"I have told you once that I am not ill, and that there is nothing you can do for me. I am sorry you should have been sent for last night, when it was most unnecessary."

She gathered her shawl in her arms, and walked majestically from the deck downstairs.

I sympathised with the poor doctor, whose face wore that peculiar look I had seen before. He followed her for a few moments with his eyes, and then turned upon his heel, kicking viciously at a chair that stood in his way.

I joined him later in another part of the ship, where we smoked our weeds together. He was not looking his best, nor could I get him into conversation until I alluded to Miss Mainwaring.

"You did not seem to be better treated than I was by that handsome girl," I remarked.

"Did you see it? Did you hear her speech to me? By Jove! fancy having to take all that, and much more that is pleasant, added on to one's pay! I never saw her till last night, when I was sent for to attend her by the lady in her cabin. It appears she came on board with fever, and that kind of thing, from travelling down country in the heat. She was really ill last night—too ill to be rude, at all events. Who is she?"

"She is under the care of the captain, I know that much and no more—except that she is wonderfully handsome."

"And has a deucedly bad temper—*I* know that much."

"She appears unhappy as well as ill, so I suppose we

ought to make allowances. She snubbed me this afternoon."

"I told you the women are past finding out. I have studied them a good deal since I joined this service. You get a good insight into their little idiosyncrasies on board ship. I tell you there is nothing they will not dare to do. Mothers will fight like cat and dog to secure the best seat or the last orange for their youngsters. I have heard of one major's wife pinching another officer's wife who shared her cabin, because they had a difference of opinion about the port being shut. You have no idea what little scenes go on in these ships. That old woman the stewardess would spin you yarns by the hour together, of petty quarrels as well as serious rows, that go on among the lady passengers. I pity *that* girl's cabin companion, if she is as polite to her as she seems capable of being. What do you say, Major Darrell?"

"I don't think she would be likely to take part in petty quarrels at all events, though I can imagine her a formidable enemy, if really roused into passion, by some great wrong, real or imaginary."

"I should not like to marry such a temper," said the doctor; "though I admit she is very handsome, and may have the rare charm of individuality. Perhaps she may improve on acquaintance, who knows? *Nous verrons.*"

CHAPTER IV.

(The Author.)

FAMILY JARS.

LEAVING, for a while, Major Darrell and the *Rungapore*, I must take my readers from sea to dry land—very dry land, indeed—for it is one of the hottest stations in Bengal.

Here were stationed the —— Native Cavalry. The colonel, a heavy man in the saddle, and heavier still in society, was popular with his officers, though, as a soldier, they had no great opinion of their chief. "Old Cox," as they were wont to call him amongst themselves, was not a commanding officer to inspire admiration from a military point of view.

He made deplorable blunders on all occasions where his own discretion was called into play. On field days, or grand military displays before the commander-in-chief, his juniors blushed for very shame. "Old Cox" was sure to do the wrong thing, and there were young subalterns in the regiment who could have told him

where his faults lay, and have commanded with better credit.

The major, on the other hand, was a fine soldier, and saved the credit of the regiment whenever he had an opportunity of doing so by military skill. Now and then, these opportunities were given him, and no one admired this dashing soldier more than his good-natured, lethargic colonel, although in private life there was not much love lost between them.

What the junior officers deplored in their colonel they admired in the major; but, on the other hand, when needing advice and sympathy, it was to "Old Cox" they went.

Not one of their number would have thought of confiding personal difficulties to Major Graham, or expecting any sympathy from him.

It is Major Graham's dinner-hour; the major, his wife, and daughter, are at their second course.

Mrs. Graham looks like the elder sister of the fair girl who calls her "mother." But then the major has been twice married, and this young daughter is by a former wife. Mrs. Graham is still young, and has attractions of her own, greater than the simple child-like beauty of her step-daughter, who is just from school.

"Has Gertrude written to you this mail? I see she could have done so if she liked. The *Rungapore* arrived at Madras before the mail left," remarked Major Graham.

"I had a few lines—a very few, for she was not well."

"Then why did you not mention it before? I always have to pump you for every piece of intelligence that other women tell their husbands."

"Indeed, if I had thought you cared to know it, I would have told you when the letter came," said his wife. "Would you like to see it now? It is a very sad one."

"Oh! no, thank you. I have plenty to do without reading the stuff that women write to each other. I don't want to see it, only another time, I should like to be able to answer tender inquiries after Miss Mainwaring. I should not have thought of her, only young Stanley asked me, as we came from stables this morning, what news my wife had from her sister; for he seemed to know the ship had passed Madras."

"Gertrude left many friends behind who will be anxious for news of her," said Mrs. Graham, sadly.

A long silence followed, which the major employed in eating heartily—drinking even with keener satisfaction than he ate.

Mrs. Graham knew better than to pursue the conversation. She had been married only two years, but in that time had learned when to speak and when to refrain from words. The subject that her husband had commenced was, to her, a most painful one.

Her young sister, Gertrude Mainwaring, had, after the death of their mother, come out to India, to join the Grahams. It was her only home; after that event Mrs. Graham urged her coming, and even the major

enclosed in his wife's affectionate letter a short note of invitation.

Gertrude at once prepared for her voyage, and it was arranged that Blanche, the major's daughter, should leave England by the same steamer.

This was a good arrangement for both, and before the voyage was ended, the girls had become firm friends.

Gertrude, though much older, and of such a perfectly different temperament, had gained the younger girl's affections entirely, and Blanche would confide to Gertrude all her doubts and fears about her new mother, of whom she knew nothing beyond having been at her father's wedding, and been kissed by the handsome woman, who was the bride, and who told her she must call her "mother."

Gertrude listened to all her childish talk, and laughed away her fears—telling Blanche how fortunate she was in gaining such a stepmother—extolling her sister's virtues so warmly that she created, at last, in Blanche's heart a desire to know more of Mrs. Graham, and both girls longed for the voyage to be over.

The affection between them did not lessen after their arriving in India.

Blanche, from timidity, could not, at first, return all the love which her handsome stepmother offered her. Mrs. Graham was a little disappointed to find her so shy and undemonstrative; but doubted not that, in time, she would be able to gain her, as Gertrude had.

She was glad her sister and Blanche should be friends and constant companions, and she was content to wait until the young girl should give her heart.

The major, however (though setting no very good example himself by his own manner towards his new wife), viewed with displeasure Blanche's coldness, and did the very worst thing he could have done. He remonstrated with his daughter, and desired her to treat Mrs. Graham with more intimacy and affection.

Poor Blanche, for some days after her father's reproof tried her utmost to force more warmth into her manner. Mrs. Graham saw the effort she was making, and wished that her husband had let things take their course without comment, for she was confident of gaining Blanche by degrees.

Major Graham, however, would not wait the young girl's time. He watched his daughter day by day, and was ever on the look-out for some slight, or what he chose to fancy such, from Blanche to her step-mother. He took into his head the notion that Gertrude had something to do with it all; and, at last, one day, having returned home ill-humoured to dinner, he openly at table taxed Gertrude with alienating the girl from his wife, and of entirely monopolizing her affection.

He accused her of selfishness, and even of meanness, for so doing, speaking in harsh, coarse tones.

Gertrude, whose high spirit never could brook even contradiction, was up in arms in a moment, proudly

denying any attempt to influence Blanche, and indignantly denouncing his accusations as cowardly and cruel.

Gertrude's anger knew no bounds. She declared she would leave the house, and was only deterred from her intention by dint of her sister's entreaties and Blanche's tears.

It was long before this attack upon her, by her brother-in-law, was forgiven. Civilities, and even an attempt at affection passed between them; but each knew that there rankled in their hearts a *something* that was incurable.

CHAPTER V.

AN EXPLOSION.

A YEAR passed in this way.

Blanche had by this time become really fond of her good step-mother; but for Gertrude her love was far deeper and stronger. She worshipped this grand creature, and wound herself so closely round Gertrude's heart that the elder girl would have been less than human had she not loved her with almost equal affection.

Lovers had presented themselves during the year that had elapsed. Gertrude had refused two offers of marriage, which had not tended to propitiate her brother-in-law. He would gladly have seen her provided for and off his hands, for poor Gertrude had scarcely sufficient money to dress upon, and Major Graham was not a generous brother-in-law.

At length a most desirable suitor presented himself —a civilian—young, well off and good-looking.

The proposal was made through the major.

Gertrude had liked this man well enough. They had met a great deal, and become on very friendly terms. Very frequently of late had he come to the bungalow and spent long musical evenings. They had met at balls, and Gertrude gave him always more than one dance, not, as he proudly hoped, because she preferred him to others, but simply because he danced well, and his waltzing suited her own.

It had never entered Gertrude's brain that this young man loved her, far less that she could never care for him. So when she heard from her brother-in-law of his desire to make her his wife she was startled as well as pained, and she refused him.

Major Graham at first tried, by all the most persuasive language he could call up, to shake her determination, but in vain. Then he let his true nature show itself, and pointed out the folly of refusing so desirable a husband, when she was actually dependent upon his charity for a home.

"You have not a penny to bless yourself with, and yet you give yourself these airs! God knows what you intend to do if you *don't* marry—girls are such fools. They think they are to have a flock of lovers always at their feet to pick and choose from! Let me tell you this kind of thing does not go on for ever, and *you* cannot afford to fling away a chance like this. You must be an idiot, Gertrude! Besides, I wonder you don't see that a man does not look forward to having his wife's sister on his hands *all* his life——"

"To marry, for the sake of a home, a man I do not love, would be to despise myself as I despise your words. To accept longer a home under your roof after such words have been spoken would be to lower myself in my own eyes almost as much——"

Gertrude stood erect and pale as she slowly and scornfully uttered these words. She looked for a few moments straight at the man who had insulted her—then walked indignantly from the room.

CHAPTER VI.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

Soon afterwards, agitated and trembling from head to foot, Gertrude left the bungalow, without one word to her sister or to Blanche, feeling that to see either would render her unable to carry out her resolution; yet to stay was impossible!

Once outside the gate of the compound surrounding the Graham's bungalow, Gertrude paused in the dusty road. Now for the first time came upon her the hard practical question—"What was she to do next?" So far, she had been upheld by pride and indignation. Now her friendless, homeless condition in a strange country came upon her with its dead blank.

Half dazed, her eyes lighted upon the thatched roof belonging to the Colonel, who had always been kindness itself, and whose wife was Gertrude's most intimate friend. Instinctively she bent her steps in that direc-

tion, and soon found herself in front of the verandah, where, seated on one chair with his legs cocked up on another, was the colonel, smoking lazily. Close by was his wife on a low seat, trying to get cool, after an unusually stifling day.

"Hullo! What's this, Miss Mainwaring?" The Colonel pushed away the chair in front of him, and came towards Gertrude.

"Why this *is* good of you to come in so unceremoniously," said Mrs Cox, rising. "You have brought your work and some music too, I hope, my dear."

"I have brought nothing," said poor Gertrude, fairly breaking down—"nothing but myself! You will let me stay—You will let me sleep here to-night?" She threw herself into a chair, and for the first time burst into tears.

"Whew! That's it, is it? Come, come, my dear, don't fret. Just tell us all about it—or shall I guess? and you can tell me if I am wrong, you know," said the Colonel. "You and your brother-in-law have had a row—eh? is'nt that it?"

"Don't tease the poor child," said his wife; "don't worry her with questions just now, Harry. Come with me to my room, Gertrude. Stay! of course you shall stay as long as you like. Come, dry your tears, like a good child." Mrs. Cox folded Gertrude to her ample bosom, in a motherly embrace, purring over her like a sleek tabby over her kitten.

The Coxes knew pretty well—as did most of the

regiment—how matters stood in Major Graham's household, and that Gertrude's position there was not an enviable one. It was easy to guess that the major was at the bottom of her present distress; and Mrs. Cox soon learned that this was the case from Gertrude herself, who recovering a little from her agitation, gave a full account of what had happened, finding abundance of sympathy in her kind-hearted friend.

Gertrude wrote a long letter to her sister before going to bed that night, the tears blinding her eyes and falling upon the paper while she wrote. She told Florence her reasons for so suddenly leaving the bungalow, and how she could not have trusted herself to see either her sister or Blanche before she left. She spoke of her determination never again to enter Major Graham's house, but entreated Florence to come to her.

Mrs. Graham had heard her husband's version of what had occurred between Gertrude and himself. She knew that there must have been words of insult spoken by him to her sister, although he would not admit this to be the case. In her reply to Gertrude's letter she said all that words could express of sorrow for what had driven her from the house, and entreated her to return. She dare not, she said, come herself, or allow Blanche to do so; her husband having forbidden any intercourse unless she would agree to return to his roof.

Later in the day poor Blanche sent a voluminous epistle, full of epithets, such as girls of her age indulge in when addressing a bosom friend.

She was sure her "Naughty Papa" had said "horrid dreadful words" to frighten away her darling! "It was cruel of him; but, of course he did not mean it," and Gertrude must come back, and be "her own darling Queen" again, &c. &c. &c.

CHAPTER VII.

"OLD COX."

It was with difficulty that Gertrude, who had been now for some days with the Coxes, could be induced to take the usual evening drive with her friends.

What she had so dreaded occurred on the second occasion of her going out—a meeting with the Grahams —the major driving his wife and daughter.

As the carriages drew nearer and nearer to each other Mrs. Graham and Gertrude became equally agitated. The latter had courage to look for her sister's recognition; while Florence, leaning forward, tried to smile, though with an anxious and pained expression on her face. Blanche waved her hand again and again, her young face flushed and animated.

Major Graham sat, coachman-like, with his legs straight together, and his eyes fixed upon his horses' heads. He could not have failed to recognize the colonel's carriage; but, to all appearance, he was taken

up entirely with his horses, and wholly unconscious of other things.

This incident decided what as yet had only been floating in Gertrude's mind—she must leave Dinabad—she must go to England!

To remain in the station was impossible, since by so doing she would come in constant contact with those whom she loved, and yet must meet as strangers, or as ordinary bowing acquaintance.

Sleepless and unhappy, she longed for the morning. She had decided to write to the only relative that would be likely to receive her in England, Lady Dartmoor, her grandfather's third wife, Gertrude's own grandmother having been the baronet's first. Gertrude had been a favourite with this *quasi* relative, and had often spent weeks at a time at Dartmoor Park. Lady Dartmoor was proud of the girl's beauty. She was a thorough woman of the world; and filled her house with celebrities of all kinds; but could only tolerate *relations* when the men were prosperous and the women pretty.

Gertrude, feverish and unrefreshed, rose before the sun had had time to make his full power felt. She set herself to work, and wrote to this amply dowered widow. She related exactly what had taken place, told her painful position with regard to her sister, and concluded by begging Lady Dartmoor to receive her. At the end of her letter she left space for the name of the steamer, and the date at which she would sail. Having finished her task she felt happier, and brightened up

before meeting her good host and hostess. The English mail had that morning arrived, and Colonel Cox was devouring the *Times* newspaper when Gertrude addressed him.

"Will you tell me what is the name of the next steamer for home, after to-morrow's mail?"

"Eh—what my dear? Did you speak?"

"I asked if you knew the name of the steamer taking the next week's mail to England."

"No, I don't; but I can find out in a minute by looking at the *Calcutta Press*."

"Because," said Gertrude, "I must go home by that steamer. I ought to have gone by this next mail."

"God bless my soul! Go home! Why, you have only just come to us. I hope, my dear girl, you do not think of leaving us. I am sure my wife would like nothing better than to keep you with us till we go home ourselves next spring. You mustn't think of leaving us yet."

"I wish I could tell you how much I feel your kindness, but I cannot bear to remain in the station; you don't know how dreadful it is to be so near my sister, to meet her in our drives and yet to be like strangers. I can never return to her husband's house—never," said Gertrude, her lips quivering and her colour rising.

"To be sure—to be sure; I see, my dear. Well, perhaps you are right. But it is devilish hard lines—devilish hard lines." The colonel crackled his newspaper viciously.

"I could not bear it for long," said Gertrude: "I know it would break my heart. Dear Colonel Cox, will you help me to look for a steamer if I bring you the paper?"

"Of course I will; but don't be in such a hurry. Talk it over with my wife: she's a wonderful woman, and very likely she will be able to make you see it all in a new light, and get you to stay with us till we go ourselves."

"Oh, that can never be; I must go at once," said Gertrude. "You are so kind, and will help me." Gertrude brought the paper, and they looked it over together.

"Where are we? Oh, here. On the 10th instant, the Insular and Asiatic Company's steamer *Gopore*. That is to-morrow; you can't go by that, at any rate. Then on the 17th the *Rungapore*, Captain Bowmar——"

"That will do, thank you. The *Rungapore*, I must go by that," said Gertrude, carrying away the paper to her own room. She sat down at once and copied the name of the steamer and the date of departure into her letter to Lady Dartmoor.

As she sealed it there rushed into her mind, for the first time, the fact that she had not money nearly sufficient for her passage. Gertrude had never experienced the actual want of money, though it was only by the greatest care that her small income was made to last out the year. What was to be done now? She felt herself checkmated at the last moment. How was it

that this most necessary thing *money* had never been in all her thoughts, as she had planned her return to England during her sleepless night?

She sat dejected and stupefied by this new anxiety. Her letter was of no use, her hopes of leaving India gone. How could she have been such a fool as to forget the impossibility of doing *anything* without money? Some time later Mrs. Cox found her heart-sick and in tears.

"Gertrude, what is this I hear? The Colonel tells me you talk of going home. Now you really must not fret in this way, or I shall think you are not happy with us. What is it now, my child—any news from your sister or Blanche? Come, what is it?"

"Oh! not that—not that; I find after all that I cannot go—that is what distresses me. I was so foolish not to have thought of it before. I must wait till I get an answer from England, if you will indeed keep me——"

"Why, my child, that is exactly what both the Colonel and I wish. We would like to keep you; but we quite see how painful it must be both for you and your sister, and so we have decided that it would be selfish in us to press you to stay. Do just as you feel able, Gertrude, and be sure of a welcome as long as you like to accept it."

"How good you both are! I never thought I should be placed in such a difficult position. I do indeed long to go away, if I only saw my way, but——"

Her tears flowed afresh, and Mrs. Cox again soothed her after her motherly fashion. Then she bustled away to her husband, making Gertrude promise to bathe her eyes and come to breakfast.

"Harry, the child wants money and does not like to say so. She has only just told me that after all she cannot go as she wishes. What is to be done, love?"

"Done! Why, I'll manage all that. Don't bother about money just now: don't you see I'm reading? There's every chance of a Continental war, and by Jove! it will be a stiff business if it does break out."

Gertrude came to breakfast as she had promised. She tried to eat, but it was mere playing with the food. As they left the table the Colonel sauntered into the room known as his den. In a few minutes Gertrude, hearing her name called, went to him there.

"It's the *Rungapore*, is it not, that you chose? sails on the seventeenth, hum! That's very soon—sorry to part with you, my dear girl, very; but it must be painful work for all you women, most of all for yourself. Now what I was going to say is——"

Here the Colonel cleared his throat, hesitated, and turned his back on Gertrude. "If you *must* go, my dear, consider your passage paid, that's all—I've arranged it all." With these words the Colonel made a hasty retreat into the verandah, whistling a march.

"Stop!" said Gertrude, following him, overcome by this kind though clumsy speech.

"Can't stop, my dear—got an appointment. Ta, ta!"

So it was arranged that Gertrude should leave India in ten days, good "Old Cox" acting the father's part in seeing her safe to Calcutta.

He it was whom Major Darrell, at the commencement of this story, saw introducing Gertrude to the captain of the *Rungapore*.

"I'd rather have the siege of Delhi over again than that journey to Calcutta," the Colonel said afterwards to his wife. "That girl's face, as I saw her last, will haunt me. Graham wants a horsewhipping. It will be a devilish hard matter to be civil to him again, after seeing that poor girl suffer as I saw her suffer. Damned shame!" The Colonel threw his cap on the table with an angry flourish.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TENOR NOT UP TO TIME.

It was not surprising that Gertrude Mainwaring felt forlorn and miserable after Colonel Cox had taken leave of her, on the crowded deck of the *Rungapore,* or that she shrank at first from mixing in that throng of strangers.

She had had distress of mind as well as fatigue of body, during her trying journey down country; the heat so intense that she more than once despaired of being able to reach Calcutta without breaking the journey, which would have lost her the steamer.

"Keep up your pluck, my dear girl, and come on!" the old Colonel would say, when Gertrude declared she could bear the red-hot railway carriage no longer, but must halt for the night at some station. "Devilish hot place this, to die in! Much better make up your mind, and come on."

Again at Allahabad, Gertrude declared she could go no further.

"By-and-by the sun will go down," he said, "and then we shall breathe again, I daresay; cheer up, cheer up!"

Thus encouraged, she braved the broiling heat, travelling for three days and nights incessantly.

All this left her weak and feverish, with a dull aching of heart, and anxiety about the future.

For some days she was really ill, only recovering sufficiently to leave her cabin as the vessel reached Madras.

The woman who attended on her expatiated upon the benefit she would derive by going on deck, until Gertrude, too weak to argue the point, and feeling weary of the stuffy cabin, and a desire for change of any kind, at last suffered herself to be treated like a sick child. She longed to look upon the open sea; but yet dreaded the motley crowd she must encounter.

Coming for the first time among her fellow-passengers, she felt her loneliness more than ever. All seemed to have friends but herself! She became sensible of her isolated position. She fancied herself the object of remark—which indeed she was; and wherever she turned she encountered the curious gaze of those around her.

Had she known that it was her rare beauty which attracted, and not, as she imagined, the circumstance of her being alone, she might have felt more happy and at ease. As it was, she avoided even those who were anxious to show her kindness, and was abrupt and freezing in her manner to all who addressed her.

This unnatural feeling wore off day by day. Those who had pronounced her "very handsome, but with a temper," came to acknowledge that she was both handsome and agreeable.

It was Blanche Graham's farewell letter that Gertrude had been reading, when a portion of it was blown away by the breeze across the deck, and restored to her by Major Darrell. She reproached herself afterwards for the ungracious speech she had made him in return for this little act of kindness; but then he had transgressed by looking at her too curiously, she thought, when she first made her appearance on deck. She had resented this at the moment, as also the doctor's semi-professional inquiries.

By degrees she began to take some interest in what was passing among her fellow-creatures. She found herself wondering "Who was who?"

Was that tall, pale lady, with the family of troublesome children, the wife of the good-looking man who danced attendance upon her, carrying her chair from place to place, arranging her cushions, and playing so good-naturedly with the children? She found he was not, but only a friend of a few days' standing.

That delicate child who seemed all eyes and no body, and too ill to cry or move. How tenderly both father and mother watched it! Would it ever live to reach home?

That old gentleman, who had always a staff of young military-looking men around him. Who was he? He seemed very popular; but was not too particular in his

language; he spoke loudly, and would often introduce some pretty round oaths in his conversation—not in anger, but simply as it appeared from habit. This was General Bluff, V.C., a great man, and the hero of the affair at Mhow. The children all adored him, for he would sometimes romp with them like a schoolboy.

Then there were the Madras passengers, who formed a little clique apart, and looked a degree more sickly than even the Calcutta people. Among them there was a queer trio—a lady and two gentlemen. Which was the lady's husband? The little man, no doubt; who sang duets with her of an evening, and was constantly humming airs from various operas. Wrong again! He was only a friend. Her husband was that heavy-looking man with red hair, who seldom addressed her, but seemed very good friends with her aide-de-camp, or "tame cat," as the friend appeared to be.

Gertrude amused herself by watching all these people as she became stronger and more at her ease. By-and-by she made a few friends among the lady passengers, Mrs. Leonard and her daughter from Agra becoming her especial favourites. She frequently joined them on deck, and at their request brought out her music.

Her fine voice soon became the subject of comment by all on board, and she was besieged by the musical coteries to take part in duets and glees. Dr. Masters, too, produced his songs, begging Gertrude to accompany him. He sang well, and never anything but good music.

A concert was to be got up under the auspices of the Madras lady, Mrs. Darley, and Mr. Mavis, her attendant satellite. Gertrude was enlisted, and the doctor, and a few smaller stars.

It was arranged by the indefatigable little Mr. Mavis to have a rehearsal of all the part songs on the day before the concert. The hour fixed was three o'clock, when Gertrude, who was to practise her duet with Dr. Masters, consented to be at the piano.

Little Mavis was there to conduct and criticize, while his lady friend accompanied the vocalists. The heavy husband was, of course, *nowhere*.

As Gertrude approached, Mrs. Darley was having a preliminary canter on the pianoforte, a kind of general scrimmage from the bass to the treble and down again. Seeing Gertrude, she made a hasty downstairs scale, and a series of final chords and flourishes.

Mr. Mavis came forward and introduced the two ladies, and in another moment Dr. Masters was there, making profuse apologies for being late.

"*Allons donc!*" said the little man, who aped the airs of a professional, and very nearly succeeded.

It happened that there was no other copy of the duet they were about to sing than the one belonging to Gertrude. Dr. Masters took it from her hand, and was about to place it before Mrs. Darley, on the piano, when he stopped short, and held it before him unopened. It had a name written on it.

"Whose music is this?" he asked, not addressing

anybody in particular, his eyes still upon the outside leaf.

"Mine," said Gertrude.

"How did you get it?" he asked excitedly.

"How did I get it?" repeated Gertrude bewildered. "What do you mean?"

"Who gave it to you—Do you know the——"

"I have told you it is mine," Gertrude said, smiling, but colouring; "if it was not mine, I should not have written my name upon it."

"Then that is your name?"

"Yes."

He opened the music and placed it before Mrs. Darley.

There was some recitative at the commencement for the tenor voice. Mrs. Darley played the few chords of symphony, but no voice came; the Doctor was not up to time, indeed his eyes were fixed steadfastly on Gertrude, and not on the music.

All turned a look of inquiry towards him; Gertrude blushed deeply, when she became conscious of his fixed gaze.

"I beg ten thousand pardons—I really—will you mind beginning again?" he said, addressing Mrs. Darley.

Mrs. Darley, not best pleased, played the chords a second time, and then his clear voice declaimed the words of the recitative, in a manner which surprised even little Mr. Mavis.

"Bravo! bravo!" exclaimed the little man, *sotto voce*.

Then came Gertrude's solo; her rich and sympathetic contralto called forth the acclamations of all three, and by the time the two voices blended in the duet there had collected around the skylight above a crowd of listeners, who could not refrain from applauding when the piece came to an end.

"Admirable, indeed," said Mr. Mavis—"little fear that the concert will be a success if others acquit themselves as well."

There followed a Mavis and Darley duet. Mrs. Darley had once had a flexible soprano, and was under the impression herself that it was so still. She sang the same songs as of old, giving runs, shakes, and trills, in a manner that reminded one only of the glory that was past, and suggested a lack of oil in the machinery, which was getting worn out.

Gertrude had by this time had enough of the rehearsal; and finding the close proximity to the screw of the vessel very unpleasant (for the piano was placed very nearly over it, an arrangement most inexplicable, which occurs on board most of the I. and A. steamers), she beat a retreat, thinking over the strange behaviour of Dr. Masters, and of the earnest way in which he had looked at her.

The concert was a success. Among the gentlemen were other good voices besides Dr. Masters; nor was Gertrude the only lady who acquitted herself creditably. Still all agreed that throughout the programme nothing

was so pleasing, nothing so well done, as the duet between the Doctor and Miss Mainwaring.

"They seem to have been made to sing together, I declare," remarked one lady.

The fact was, the pure tenor of the Doctor harmonized melodiously with Gertrude's rich contralto, and both had evidently been well taught.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FUR MAN.

As was predicted, a perfect invasion of Australian and China passengers took place at Galle. The ship was, for the time, converted into a perfect Bedlam.

The deck, already crowded, became a hopeless confusion, and the wonder was, how these new comers were to be stowed below; nor was the influx limited to persons. A new army of chairs of all shapes and sizes arrived with their owners, and were shoved indiscriminately, for the present, into a heap, some broken by the rough usage, some strong enough to bear the shocks they sustained.

The contrast between the Australians and the China passengers, in appearance, was so marked that you could have put your hand on each, and sorted them.

The rubicund skins and burly forms of the Australians were almost overpowering, and suggested the idea that a little bleeding might make them feel more comfortable. Perhaps it was the contrast between themselves and

their yellow-skinned brethren from China and India which exaggerated this idea, but certainly one could hardly believe they belonged to the same race—such is the effect of the climate.

Those who had started from Calcutta, in the *Rungapore*, looked upon this invasion very much as the occupants of a London omnibus regard the arrival of the thirteenth passenger inside, and they scowled with much the same expression of countenance as greets the old lady who treads on the toes of such inside passengers, and sits down plump upon as much seat as she can get, or into the laps of her next-door neighbours.

They were felt to be intruders, and it was aggravating to the Indians to see how healthy they were—"vulgarly healthy," they would say in their wrath.

On the other hand, the good-natured Australians felt real compassion for the white-faced Anglo-Indian ladies and their puny children, congratulating themselves that their own constitutions were unimpaired, and their wives and children rosy with health.

There was rather a remarkable character among these new arrivals : a big Australian, who appeared to speak to few even among his own set, and chose as quiet a corner as he could find to plant his chair.

He generally sat with his back to everybody, or to as many as it was possible, in that crowd of passengers, and chose the extreme end of the deck almost over the screw of the ship—a place avoided by others.

He wore an amount of clothing that would have been

too heavy even for our own English climate, except in the depth of winter, and this became the remark and wonder of all in the ship.

The heat was intense, and the lightest clothing was universal with both men and women. This strange exception to the rule wore a coat and trousers of a dark and decidedly thick material, which alone would have been sufficient, one would have thought, to oppress a man of his full habit in a tropical climate. Added to these garments he wore a long seal-skin waistcoat, which fitted loosely and clumsily, and a cap of the same fur, also of a clumsy, shapeless description, and which had two flaps tied together on the top of his head.

The very look of him on a June day in England would have made you hot; and, with the glass standing over 100°, it was simply appalling. The children, of whom there were now about fifty on board, nicknamed him the "Fur Man," and in a few days he was known pretty nearly throughout the ship by the same title.

He would sometimes play for an hour together with any children who were confiding enough to go up to him, giving them his watch as a plaything, letting them climb up and down him, and pull his shaggy whiskers without a murmur. Sometimes, not often, he would laugh loudly and heartily with them.

CHAPTER X.

ROUGH SYMPATHY.

On Sunday—the first since the great influx of passengers—the "Fur Man," or the "Strange Australian" as some called him, coming from his accustomed nook, and dragging his chair, which, like himself, was of the heaviest make, after him, took up his position as near as possible to the impromptu reading-desk, which was being prepared by the sailors, close to the captain's cabin, in readiness for the morning service. The Union Jack covered the cushion on which were placed the books for the clergyman's use, and the little choir had seated themselves around the harmonium.

In a few minutes two clergymen, passengers, one from India, the other from Ceylon, came forward in their surplices, and the service commenced.

The younger man read prayers, and Mr. Summers, a white-haired old man with a benevolent countenance and soft fine eyes, read the lessons and preached. He

had just returned from a long tour of mission in India, where, considering his age, it was wonderful how much fatigue he had gone through, and what success he had met with during the months he had spent in earnest labours in Bengal.

It is somehow more impressive—a service of this kind at sea than on land. The clergyman's voice, rising in exhortation, is listened to with more attention, surrounded as one is by the mighty waters, which at any moment may rise and assert themselves over man and his frail works. The hymn, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save," sounded more sweet than in any church at home, however grand the organ, however far superior the voices to those which formed the little choir on the deck of the *Rungapore*.

During the prayers, as well as the chanting, the strange Australian somewhat disturbed those around him by his loud responses and singing—or what he intended for such. It was also to be remarked, that he was the only one who knelt on the hard deck during the prayers, and it was with some difficulty that he accomplished it, owing to his size and the motion of the ship.

Gertrude Mainwaring was not at this service. She had felt depressed and languid, and came on deck too late to join the choir, to which she belonged. She, therefore, stole quietly away towards the stern, and listened to catch any words that might now and then be fitfully borne to her by the faint breeze.

The singing she enjoyed, and could follow. It sounded to her both sad and sweet, bringing up memories of India, as well as of home.

She was leaning over the side of the vessel, her face between her hands, looking into the blue-green sea, never heeding the sun which was beating down upon her head; when a deep voice close to her ear, made her start—

"Take care, pretty one! the back of the neck is the worst place! If you *must* stand here, take this." It was the "Fur Man," holding out an umbrella covered with white calico.

"Oh, thank you," said Gertrude, "but I am not afraid of the sun." She declined his offer, adding, "I was only waiting here till the service was over."

"Should have come to it, pretty one—should join in."

"I know I should; but I was late, and did not like to disturb the people."

"To be sure, quite right—quite right. You seem a little lonesome like, young lady; I've noticed that—I *do* some things, not many. I'm a lonely man myself, perhaps that's why——"

"I am alone, on board," said Gertrude, a little touched; "I am sorry you feel dull and lonely

"Thank you, my pretty, thank you—mind the sun upon that little head. Take an old man's advice—take ——an——old——man's——"

too."

His words died away in the distance, as he sauntered back to his old position in the stern of the ship.

For a moment, when he turned his honest eyes upon Gertrude and spoke his well-meant words of caution, an indistinct flash of memory recalled to her some other face. Whose was it?

CHAPTER XI.

OSTRICH FEATHERS.

THE *Rungapore* was at anchor close to the thirsty shores of Aden for some hours. Some of the most enterprising passengers would not be content to remain quiet, and bear the heat as best they could on board.

They must go on shore. They must drive to see the Tanks. They must buy ostrich feathers. They must do their best to get sunstrokes.

These were the young and reckless, who were ready for any variety during the voyage, even at the risk of their lives.

Major Darrell was too old a traveller to join these sightseers. Gertrude Mainwaring had expressed a desire to go on shore with her friends, the Leonards, but had been dissuaded by the accounts given her, both by Dr. Masters and Major Darrell, of the barrenness of the place, the intense heat, and the bad hotels; added to which, Gertrude knew that her purse was not well able to stand the extra expense attending the excursion.

Presently the queer red-haired native feather merchants came on board hawking their goods. Ladies swarmed round these men, beating down their prices, or, at all events, doing their best to get a good bargain. Feathers were being flaunted in all directions.

Gertrude would not trust herself to look at what she knew she could not purchase. The long white plumes tempted her sorely, but she would none of them.

"Why don't you buy one, my dear Miss Mainwaring?" asked Mrs. Tarbrush, from Loodiana. "This white one, now, would become you so well! You really should not lose such an opportunity—only four rupees—a feather that would cost a guinea at home."

"Not buy? So sheap, dirty sheap!" said the merchant, persuasively.

"I do not want any," said Gertrude, turning away. The man pursued her.

"You really should take it," said the officious lady, also following her. "I gave nearly twice the money for this;" and she held a similar feather between her fingers.

"I do not buy it because I cannot afford it," said Gertrude. "I wish the man would go." At the same time she cast longing eyes at the pure white plume nearly half a yard long.

"Come now, Miss Mainwaring, I can't believe four rupees would ruin you," persisted the lady; "think what a nice present it would be at home, even if you don't want it yourself."

"I have no money, not even four rupees, to spare," said Gertrude, colouring. "Cannot you believe me?"

This silenced the lady, but not the man, who pestered her until just before the anchor was weighed for a fresh start, and the ship cleared of all of his kind.

Gertrude had cause to congratulate herself that she had not gone on shore; for her friends returned jaded and ill from incipient sunstroke, condemning Aden as the most uninteresting, most scorching, of all places on the face of the earth. Added to this, they discovered that they had paid double for their purchases in the shops, and had to endure the chaff of those who had remained quietly on board and secured better bargains.

That evening Gertrude was sitting alone. Her friends, the Leonards, were suffering too much from headache and fatigue, after their foolish expedition, to come on deck for the usual evening stroll.

The gentlemen had had their after-dinner smoke. Ladies were chatting confidentially with their bosom friends. Gertrude had got somehow seated in the midst of the Madras coterie, and felt uncomfortable and *de trop*. She longed to move, but saw no other available chair, nor a spot to which she could convey her own. There was a cross fire of facetious jokes on each side of her, and yet she was taking no part in the conversation, but only seemed to be in the way.

She was very forlorn, when Major Darrell standing behind her chair, held something over her shoulder.

"I am going to ask you to do me the favour to accept

these," he said. "I think they are what all ladies admire, are they not, Miss Mainwaring?"

It was a long tin case, full of the choicest ostrich feathers, much finer than any Gertrude had seen that afternoon.

"How beautiful!" said Gertrude, her face lighting up with pleasure, as she took them out of the case. "Oh, Major Darrell, you are very kind. One will be a great present; but, indeed, I cannot take them all."

"Then what shall I do with the rest?" he asked.

"You must have some other lady friends on board or at home," said Gertrude, "to whom they would be a great present. I could not be so selfish as to keep all these." She looked up at him, smiling, as she said this, her face flushed with embarrassed pleasure.

Cuthbert Darrell thought it worth all the produce of Aden to see her smile like that. He looked down with almost tenderness, saying—

"Those you will not keep shall go over here," putting his hand over the side of the ship. "They are for no one else."

"Oh, then, I will keep them all," said Gertrude, laughing. "It would be a pity to give such pretty things to old Neptune. I am so very much obliged to you for them. Have I said so? I hope I did. You don't know how I longed to buy one this afternoon—like these, only not half so beautiful!"

Cuthbert Darrell did not say so, but he did know all about it. He had been sitting, unobserved, close to

where Gertrude, her lady friend, and the feather merchant were standing, and had heard all that passed. He had seen in her face the girlish longing for that which she could not buy—heard her frank confession that she was too poor to spend her money on such things—and he admired her truthfulness. In a few minutes he had secured the finest set of pure white feathers he could find among the hawkers on board, and these he had given to Gertrude.

"I am doubly glad that I can give you what you really like," he said; "if you only knew how it rejoices me to afford you pleasure——"

"Are we to have any music to-night, Miss Mainwaring? I have brought a message from Mr. Mavis. It is to ask if you will take part in a trio—I may say you are coming?"

It was Dr. Masters, who spoke. He had pushed his way between chairs and people, and was standing before them. He had lately taken up a different manner towards Gertrude. Sometimes it was one almost of command, which astonished Gertrude herself. Strange to say, however, she did not resent it, as a high-spirited girl like herself would have been expected to do. No; she had even begun to like it. She recognised a stronger will than her own, and to her surprise as well as that of other close observers, she generally yielded to his peremptory suggestions.

Cuthbert Darrell had noticed this, and it nettled him not a little. He disliked the man's manner, and

this evening it particularly annoyed him; for he had promised himself a pleasant hour of Gertrude's society.

Baulked he was; for Gertrude, as she was asked, went to the saloon for music.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FUR CAP IN DANGER.

THROB! Throb! never weary the engines, never tired the screw, as the *Rungapore* steamed nearer and nearer to the old country.

The time to some seemed longer and more tedious as the voyage progressed; while there were others who were well content to linger on the journey. For in many breasts pain mingled with pleasure at the thought of missing the dear faces of those who had passed away, and of finding an empty chair in the home they loved so well.

Gertrude Mainwaring was one of those who felt no joy at the prospect of the journey being ended. She had begun to look upon the ship as her only home, and the thought that in a short time the voyage would be over, became, though she was scarcely conscious of it, more and more distasteful to her.

Was she not going home, as it were, in disgrace? To find perhaps a cold welcome, or perhaps no welcome at

all? She had come to dread the very name of Southampton, and clung to the few friends she had made on board with a peculiar tenacity.

It was a red hot evening, the sea, calmer than calm, reflected the flaming sunset sky above.

The water for the time resembled in colour—and might have consisted of—*golden syrup*, so red and solid was it in appearance.

The deck was crowded with perspiring passengers, whose tempers, especially the children's, were tried to the uttermost by prickly heat.

Not a breath of air was stirring, nor did the motion of the ship, steaming at the rate of eleven knots an hour, cause the slightest flutter of a ribbon, or the disarrangement of a hair.

The "Fur Man" was seated in the old nook, with a group of children round him. Some were playing the mischief with his watch, which he suffered them to swing round by its chain, sometimes letting it fall from their hands on the deck. Others were on his knees, on his back, everywhere, that they could perch.

A notoriously naughty child, one of seven, and a colonel's daughter, giving a shriek of delight, seized the fur cap from his head, and rushed to the side of the ship, holding it over the rails. She had already thrown two caps belonging to passengers into the sea, which had been treated by her devoted mother as such a capital joke that she looked upon it now as her most clever feat.

"O ye gods and little fishes!" roared the "Fur Man"—and shaking the children from him right and left, as easily as Gulliver could have shaken off the Lilliputians, he dashed upon the culprit, seized her hand, which in another moment would, without doubt, have let go the cap into the sea, and shaking her so violently that the teeth chattered in her head, he uttered more than one loud oath. His face was livid with passion, and his hands shook, as he snatched the cap from her grasp, and replaced it on his head.

The child yelled aloud. Her own mother not being on the spot, she was surrounded by mothers of all ages and colonies. They cried shame on the rough treatment of "that dreadful man," pronouncing him to be mad, while they gathered their own chickens under their wings in case of a similar attack being made upon them.

Lookers-on were thunderstruck. This good-natured harmless Australian, with whom every child on board loved to play, what could have possessed him to use such violence?

All eyed him with a mixture of terror and astonishment; but within an hour, *he* at least had forgotten his passion, and was again surrounded by the children. It was in vain their mothers warned them of the risk they ran of a similar chastisement if they provoked the "Fur Man." They could not keep away from their big playfellow, who was as gentle as possible now. Even the little girl who had so transgressed wheedled

herself in among the others, and he stroked her head and cuddled her in his great arms by way of reconciliation.

But——

The cap was now tied firmly beneath his chin by two black strings, the flaps of sealskin, which before had been fastened above his head, being now pulled well down over his ears; nor did he ever again appear without having his head-gear thus adjusted and secured.

It must have made him ten times hotter; but then he seemed equal to any amount of clothing. The perspiration stood on his great face, and soaked the cap at its edges, making the fine fur stick together in greasy tufts. He was not a pleasant object to look upon, certainly; and yet there was, in that great wide face, that rough and massive exterior, something which spoke of a generous heart thumping beneath his clumsy waistcoat.

Children seldom choose out bad-tempered or evil-disposed persons for their friends among grown-up people, and this lonely man could not have had more discerning allies than these small fry.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOCTOR ASKS NON-PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONS.

"Did you see the angry bear pounce upon his victim just now?" said a voice behind Gertrude Mainwaring's chair.

"Yes, I was amazed. It was unlike him—but then those children are so audacious that I sometimes wonder at his patience with them.

"Ah! he has brought it on himself, and deserves all he gets," said Dr. Masters. "Now I make a point of never speaking to children on board, unless it is to ask them to put out their tongues. Once do so, encourage them in the very least, and your life is not worth having."

"But that is rather selfish, surely," said Gertrude; "you forget they must find the monotony of boardship life as tiresome as we older people do, and must long for some new playfellow."

"Then they *must* long, at least, as far as I am concerned," he said, throwing himself listlessly into a

chair by Gertrude's side. "Now, I should say you were an only child, Miss Mainwaring."

"Why?"

"Because, if you were not, you would not defend those troublesome little wretches—those imps of mischief—for one of a large family hates children as a rule, remembers too vividly the bullyings and jealousies endured from brothers and sisters in his or her own childhood, ever to like the species again. Besides, it must be a great bore to see one's own features repeated so often, and sometimes in caricature. Don't you think so?"

"I have never considered the question," said Gertrude, laughing.

"Perhaps you were never similarly tried. I fancy not. I have other reasons for believing you are an only daughter, if not an only child," he said, edging his chair a little closer to hers.

Gertrude, who seemed amused at the turn his conversation had taken, was all animation.

"Indeed! and pray, again, why? I shall not gratify your curiosity until you have told me these other reasons."

"I am seldom wrong in my surmises on such subjects. In a room, for instance, I can generally put my hand (mentally of course), upon an only daughter, as I can upon one of seven."

"Indeed! It is very clever of you," said Gertrude, much amused.

"We will take the one-of-seven girl, for instance, and behold a skimpiness about the dress, a short allowance of ribbon about the bows, a suspicious odour about the gloves, which suggests the owner's initials being scratched somewhere inside by careful cleaners, you know; a lack of material about the skirts, and even a borrowed look about the jewellery which, to my mind, points to the fact that there are many other sisters at home to share the ornaments, if not the petticoats. Now I fancy an only daughter comes off better; at least, she looks more complete as regards dress, and has a greater independence of manner, a *je ne sais quoi*, which distinguishes her from the other. I know her as well by sight as I do Miss Septima, when I meet them both in society, and I pronounce you to be——"

"Not an only daughter," laughed Gertrude; "for if you do you are wrong."

"Ah! really now. You have a sister—sisters, I should say?"

"One."

"Married?"

"Yes."

"Ah, but married sisters don't count, not according to my theory. She does not affect you in the way an unmarried sister would."

"If you mean that I am well dressed, and have that *je ne sais quoi* about me which you profess to know at a glance, I don't believe you are sincere, for I have always been proverbial for bad dressing."

Dr. Masters did not seem to hear this remark. At all events, he did not answer it, at which Gertrude felt a little piqued. She would have liked him to say that he considered her all she should be.

There was a long pause. He sat twirling his moustache; she feeling some disappointment at his silence, perhaps a shade of anger, while, mixed with all, a strange fascination for the man was creeping over her.

"One sister married," he said, presently. "Any more sisters anywhere, or brothers, perhaps?"

"N-o-o," said Gertrude, "only two of us, now." Her eyes fell. The doctor's steadfast gaze was upon her as she raised them again after some moments, and there was a peculiar expression on his countenance—a half smile blended with a degree of keen and watchful interest. Gertrude blushed crimson. Never had the fascination, to her, been so dangerous.

"I must be off," he said, suddenly, "and go my rounds; lots of children sick just now, only from over-eating themselves, so do not waste your sympathy this time, Miss Mainwaring."

Laughing heartily, he rose to his feet, and left Gertrude, who followed him with her eyes as he walked briskly along the deck. Never had his figure looked to better advantage.

She could not help musing over his remarks and questionings. Dr. Masters eloquent on the subject of dress! The last man in the world whom she would have ex-

pected to consider such a subject worth discussing. Then, why so curious about her own people? He had shown evident interest up to a certain point, and then suddenly left her. But what dwelt most in her mind was the expression his face had worn during the latter part of his catechizing.

CHAPTER XIV.

FORTY THOUSAND POUNDS.

It is a lovely starlight night. The moon dancing merrily upon the rippling sea is making it as light as day. "A perfect night!" so thought Gertrude Mainwaring—"too perfect to be spent in sleep."

She was kneeling upon the berth close to the port-hole of her cabin, and gazing out upon the sea. A vessel was sailing by, her lights plainly discernible. Gertrude leaned out to watch her pass, and then fell a-thinking.

So deep was her reverie that half an hour elapsed, and she had not stirred. The waters gurgled and splashed beneath her, and lurid streaks of phosphorus played about the ship's side. She saw it, and she saw it not! Her very soul was stirred in a mysterious way by the man she had just left. His face looked out from the water, as vividly as the stars from the sky above her. Had he bewitched her? Never had she felt such influence; never, she thought, seen such a

face. She asked herself, What was it? It could not be *love*. He had even scoffed at sentiment of every kind; and was she, Gertrude Mainwaring, falling in love with a man who had never wooed her? True, he watched her every movement, always ready to proffer her any help, joined her on all occasions, praised her singing, never seeming weary of her society. Nevertheless, Gertrude knew, so well, that in all he said or did, *the one thing* had never been betrayed. Never had he, by word or look, hinted that there existed for her the feeling which, she was now startled to find, growing in her heart for him.

What, then, must she do? In a moment she saw the answer. Crush out at once, before it became too late, all tender thoughts, all germs of love! It was not too late if she could do it at once. She would do it, she must—now—to-night! As she thus thought, her lips quivered for one moment; the next they were set firmly together.

Gertrude was still gazing unconsciously into the water, when, as if to shake the resolve she had only just taken, there came upon her ear the sound of his voice—distinct and clear, close to her, as it seemed, upon the deck above, his own voice, and then that of the strange Australian.

Gertrude, knowing that she could not be observed from where she was, leaned out even further to catch their words. She was fascinated in spite of herself, and something kept her where she was

"Now, doctor, put yourself in my place. Once burnt, you know, you dread the fire! Now, when I lost my little all, and had to leave the Old Country, I said, George Fleming never loses sight of his money again, and George Fleming never did!"

"Then what the deuce do you do with it?"

"Shall I tell you? There's no one near us, eh?"

"I think not; the deck seems pretty clear," said the doctor, languidly.

"Why, listen, man. I've got near upon forty thousand pounds at this moment upon me! It's all here." Then came a sound as if the speaker clapped his big hands upon his chest. "And up here, between the lining and the fur!" He burst out into a loud short laugh. "Safer than any bank, man! Safer than any bank! I never part with it, night or day. Precious warm work it has been lately, I can tell you."

"And do you mean to say you sleep in that cap and waistcoat?"

"Well! no. I have not been able to do that every night. One must draw a line somewhere: and when the glass was over 100 degrees in the Red Sea, I could stand it no longer at nights, but they were always under my head for all that!"

"Good heavens!" said the doctor. "What a risk you run of heat apoplexy, with all that fur and paper about you! For, I suppose, it is in notes?"

"Notes and bills—light as feathers—anywhere but in the Red Sea. They nearly bowled me over though,

those three red-hot days we had. But I'd sooner part with my skin than this waistcoat, and would rather lose my head than my cap!"

"And do your waistcoat and cap pay you any interest on your money?" asked the doctor, laughing.

"Why, no—it would not do for a continuance, of course. I suppose I shall have to invest it in some way when I get home—but not in foreign bonds, or any of your rotten companies! No, give me something safe! land—houses—or mortgages may be."

"By Jove! Well, I have often wondered how you could endure all that fur about you in all this heat; and perhaps you do not know it, but many of the passengers call you the 'Fur man!'"

"No, do they? Good"—and the big man laughed his short loud laugh. "Don't you tell them now! mind—I don't care for it to be known. You are the only one I have told about the money. Keep it dark. What made me tell you, I wonder—what were we talking of?"

"You were telling me how you had fallen on your feet in Australia, and the speedy fortune you had made, and I asked you how you had left your money invested out there."

"That was it—to be sure; but that need not have made me so confiding; but you are safe enough, doctor. You see there are so many people of all sorts about a ship like this, that it is not everybody I should care to know what I carry about me."

"You may trust me to keep it to myself," said Dr. Masters; "and now what do you say to a brandy and soda in my cabin? I must run away from you for a few minutes to see a sick child, a second-class passenger. In five minutes you will find me in my den, and something to drink ready for us. You will come?"

"I'll be there in five minutes."

Gertrude Mainwaring heard no more, save the retreating footsteps of the doctor along the deck. She drew herself back, her mind intent upon the man who had spoken so little throughout the conversation she had overheard; to the strange Australian and his confidences, she gave only a passing thought.

At any other time she would have been amused beyond measure at the revelation, and, woman-like, she would have rejoiced at discovering the mystery of the sealskin waistcoat and cap, which had been the talk of all on board. Now, however, it all sank into insignificance; she only dwelt upon the few words of Dr. Masters, short answers enough—commonplace words—and yet they had a charm for her!

For the "Fur man" and his money, she cared no more than for Queen Elizabeth, and she had soon forgotten his existence.

Thinking, ever thinking, Gertrude fell asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

"VERY SUDDEN."

NOTHING could have been calmer than the sea on the brilliant morning following the night when Gertrude had overheard those voices above her cabin. She slept more heavily than usual in spite of the bright daylight that streamed through the open port. Not until that noisiest of women, Mrs. McGrab, awoke her with a jerk did she open her eyes this morning.

"Come, Miss, here's your tea, and I've got you a little real cow. A deal of trouble it's cost me to get this drop! Them babies takes it all, and its clean against the rules to give cow milk to any but babes and hinvalids. It's cos I know the *consecrated* milk goes against you so, that I does my best to get you this drop of real cow of a morning. Now you'll please get up, Miss, and get your bath before the rush of ladies. I always keeps the hend bath room for you, cos I know you likes it—I do my best to please my ladies, I'm sure; and near dead I am this morning with being

called to help lay out the gentleman as died in a fit last night. It don't belong to my place to lay out corpses, and I haven't the time if it did."

"Who died in a fit last night?" asked Gertrude, half asleep and half awake.

"I don't know the gent's name; but then there's so many I never hears the name of. It was terrible sudden to be sure! I says to the steward as comes to call me last night, 'Who's dead—man, woman, or child?' 'Man,' says he. 'Cabin to himself. Berths 14, 15 and 16, port side. Look sharp!' So I on with my frock and whips a shawl over my 'ead, and goes to the cabin where the poor gent lay—looking as if he was asleep and nothing more. The doctor was there, and seemed quite cut up, and as white as hashes. 'It were awful sudden, Mrs. McGrab,' he says, 'took with a fit in my cabin.'"

"How terrible!" said Gertrude, now thoroughly roused.

"Awful sad, to be sure; but there, life's uncertain. Here to-day and gone to-morrow! Terrible sad to think on, ain't it, Miss?" Here Mrs. McGrab heaved a noisy sigh; and then, lowering her voice to a persuasive whisper, added: "If you should be having any old dresses to throw away, *could* you be so kind as let me have them instead of flinging 'em overboard?"

Gertrude could not rest after the woman was gone. She felt a strange desire to hear more of the event which, it seemed, had made an impression even on the

unimpressionable Mrs. McGrab. Gertrude was soon dressed that morning, and making her way on deck. As she reached the companion stairs, she observed a knot of stewards talking together, nor could she fail to hear part of their conversation.

"Very sudden—— The Doctor says it was a fit."

"Died before he could call for assistance," came in another voice.

The men seemed concerned, and Gertrude felt that to cause such a stir among these much-enduring servants of the ship, who seldom appeared to have time to eat, drink, or sleep, much less talk together, the death must have been one of very unusual interest. On the upper deck, close to the captain's cabin, she saw another cluster of men talking together, their faces wearing much the same concern as those of the men below.

"Terrible, terrible indeed!" said an old gentleman. "Quite well, you say, up to ten o'clock last night? Dear me! I must say though I always thought him a man of apoplectic appearance."

"Dr. Masters was with him," remarked another, "when he was seized—indeed it all happened in the doctor's cabin. The poor fellow died before he could call for assistance."

Gertrude listened for more; but the men moved away in twos and threes, still apparently talking on the same subject.

Who could it be that had died so suddenly? She looked round the crowded deck for some one of whom

to ask. Where was Dr. Masters? He would be her best informant. At that moment Major Darrell approached her.

"Oh! Major Darrell, I am so glad you are come! What is all this sudden stir on board? Who is dead?

The Major's face lit up with more than pleasure at the first part of her speech. "She was glad he had come"—more than Gertrude had ever yet said to him—but the second part showed that even this meant nothing—only that she sought information of him.

"It is that strange Australian—the 'Fur man,' as he seems to be called on board, who died quite suddenly last night."

"Dead! Impossible!"

"It is so, I assure you."

"Oh, it cannot be," said Gertrude, "I heard him talking and laughing in perfect health and spirits as late as ten o'clock last night. You must mean some one else."

"There is no mistake, Miss Mainwaring; there cannot be. There is not a man on board the least like him; besides I was told by the captain that it was the man who wore the sealskin waistcoat and cap."

"Dead?"

"Dead. The seizure, it appears, was apoplectic. Such seizures are always very sudden."

"It seems so shocking," said Gertrude. "I scarcely can realize it. Poor man! He was strange and mysterious, but seemed so kind-hearted and inoffensive. Had

he no friend on board? He spoke so little, and always seemed so lonely."

"He had no friend even among the Australian passengers," rejoined Major Darrell, "beyond a casual speaking acquaintance."

"And he was rich, very rich," said Gertrude. "I wonder what will become of his money."

"His money? Was he so rich? I should not have thought it."

"And, oh! what will they do with his waistcoat and cap?" exclaimed Gertrude, excitedly. "Somebody must be told to take care of them."

Major Darrell could not refrain from laughing outright. "You must forgive me, Miss Mainwaring, but really I think the best thing that could be done with them would be to chuck them overboard."

"Oh, you don't know—you don't know, what you say. Where is the Doctor? He will understand."

She left Major Darrell gazing after her. Could she be losing her senses? It was quite impossible that the death of this poor man could be sufficient to account for such strange excitement.

"Again that confounded man the doctor." He would understand what he, Cuthbert Darrell, was not capable of entering into, according to Gertrude's last speech.

No sooner had he mentally thanked Providence for his good fortune in finding her alone, and experiencing the happiness of her society, than this feverish excitement came upon her, carrying her away from him, and

leaving him bewildered, and, if truth be told, angry as well. Gone to find the doctor! Who and what was this man who always seemed to stand between them? What, but a rival? It was too preposterous to suppose that anything connected with this dead man could account for such sudden and urgent necessity on her part to consult Dr. Masters. Could it be merely an excuse to get a *téte-à-téte* with this rival, or was she simply so soon tired of his own company? This, the unkindest cut of all, made the major wince and bite his lip impatiently as a feeling of bitter jealousy took possession of him.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DOCTOR SENT FOR—UNPROFESSIONALLY.

That which passed through Gertrude Mainwaring's mind so rapidly, while she conversed with Major Darrell, will have suggested itself likewise to the reader.

It seemed to her almost imperative that she should speak at once to the only other person in the ship who knew the dead man's secret—that she should caution him about the money being placed in safety. He might not think of it amid the sensation caused by the sudden death, added to all his other daily duties. Somebody should remind him, and that person could only be herself.

Once down the steps of the companion Gertrude stopped short. She could not go to the surgery or to his cabin. She must send for him.

She beckoned to a steward. "Go and tell Dr. Masters that Miss Mainwaring will be glad to speak to him. Tell him I shall be in the saloon, and ask him to come at once."

She chose a quiet part of the saloon free from passengers, and sat down, anxiously waiting; but as the time passed and he did not come, she lost some of her courage.

What would he think of her when she had told him what she had to say? To begin with she had to confess to eavesdropping. Was she not taking too much upon herself seeing that he knew the dead man's secret as well as she did? Should she tell him what was in her mind, or should she, after all, fly while there was time. Surely he would take precautions, and secure the money. Even if it should be stolen it could matter very little now to the dead owner.

"And yet," thought Gertrude, "suppose he has left children—a wife perhaps—whose property this money should now be." This last argument decided her to remain and tell him what she came to tell.

After she had waited a time, which to her seemed endless, the man returned who had taken the message.

"The Doctor wishes pertic'ler to know, if it is professional you want him for. He is very pertic'ler engaged. I'm to go back at once if it is, and if it isn't he will be glad to speak to you later in the day, if you'll please excuse."

"Go and tell him it is not professionally, but on business of another kind," said Gertrude.

The man smiled and shook his head slowly. "I dustn't go again, if you please, unless it's about your

'ealth. He spoke crusty, and seems very pertic'ler busy."

Gertrude's lip curled and her colour rose at the refusal of this man to do her bidding.

"Tell me where to find him then, and I will go myself."

"Oh! he's in his cabin, Miss, but he's shut himself in, as he often does when he's busy, and he can't abear to be disturbed. I'm sorry you should have the trouble, but I mustn't go again, Miss."

The man spoke civilly enough and smiled again, giving his shoulders a shrug as he, for the second time, told Gertrude that he really dare not venture again to the lion's den.

Gertrude, after hearing what the man had to say, gave up the idea of going herself, nor had she courage, in the face of the caution he had given her, to do anything more that day. Dr. Masters neither came nor sent her any message; she concluded, therefore, that he had altogether forgotten her request to see him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BODY TO THE DEEP.

A BURIAL at sea is of all funerals the most solemn. To those who are on board ship when a death occurs, and who experience for the first time the gloom cast upon the whole ship's company, it is most touching, most awe-inspiring. True, there are those who, by habit, have become accustomed to witness such things, and it is strange to see how little they are affected by them. But with those, to whom such an event is uncommon, it is different. Though the dead may be unknown even by sight, it is impossible to feel anything but horror at the thought of leaving behind in the wide ocean any member of the little community.

Yet how many hundreds, nay, thousands are there, whose only pall has been the Union Jack, whose only grave the deep, vast sea!

At eleven o'clock on the morning after the death of George Fleming, whose real name the reader heard for

the first and only time, from his own lips, the lonely man was buried at sea.

Gertrude Mainwaring was in her usual place on deck, and Major Darrell had induced her, for the second time, to play backgammon with him. They were in the middle of their game; Gertrude, who had just taken up two of her adversary's men, was laughing at his misfortunes, and her own success.

Major Darrell, thinking more of Gertrude herself than of the game, was letting her beat him easily, not from want of skill on his part, but from pre-occupation of mind.

Suddenly the throbbing of the engines slackened, until the *Rungapore* all but stopped in her course; simultaneously a bell forward tolled with a solemn sound.

The most frivolous and the most grave looked from one to the other, with a sudden change of expression.

Some, perhaps the greater number, among the passengers knew of this strange man's death; but the death had not seemed so shocking to their senses, as the mournful ceremony, which brought the event of yesterday before their minds with such terrible reality. Each face, for the time, wore an altered look. With some the impression lasted only so long as the engines ceased to throb; while for others the change was more enduring. For at least two persons on board, it was such as even years have not effaced.

Gertrude Mainwaring, always nervous and excitable, pushed away the board, on which she and Major Darrell were playing, and sprang to her feet.

"What is it, Major Darrell? Why are we stopping? What is it—that bell? I must go and find out what it is," said Gertrude, without waiting for his answer.

"Stop! you had better not, Miss Mainwaring. It will only distress you. It is for the funeral of that poor fellow who died so suddenly yesterday morning, or late the night before."

"Buried so soon! How shocking!" and the colour fled from Gertrude's face, as her eyes filled with tears.

Major Darrell saw those tears of compassion in the eyes he loved so well; and they made Gertrude more dear if possible than he had felt her to be before.

It was so seldom that this girl allowed her softer feelings to show themselves, though she lacked none of them. It was a new phase in her character, and one Cuthbert Darrell longed to see show itself. He had thought her perfect, or as near his ideal as any woman he had seen. Yet—still—there was something wanted to render her as feminine as his ideal. Was she gentler than she had let it appear? Had she deeper feelings than she allowed to come to the surface? Was she indeed all he had dreamed a woman should be? Often had he studied Gertrude Mainwaring, hoping to find she was all this—longing to see those eyes fill with tenderness and compassion, as he believed they could;

but never till to-day had that longing been realized. Tears there were now, which with difficulty she restrained from falling—tears and an expression telling of infinite compassion for this lonely man who had so suddenly been taken.

Gertrude left him, murmuring words almost inaudible; but from what he could catch, he understood her to say that she was going to attend the service.

He followed her quickly a few paces, and said:—"Excuse me, but it is not a sight for you, it will only depress you and you can do the poor fellow no good. I beg of you——"

But Gertrude was gone. She remembered with pity the solitary Australian, his friendless life on board, and strange sad speech to her that Sunday, when he addressed her in his rough, queer way, and showed her a kindness. She thought of his loneliness and her own on that morning, and how his few words had cheered her for the time.

Then came the impulse to attend his funeral, to pay some small respect to the dead, and stand by the friendless coffin, even though she could not save it from the yawning sea.

On reaching the deck below, she came upon a sad procession. The Captain was there, with one or two other officers of the ship, not in their usual dress, but in the full uniform of the company.

Good old Mr. Summers, too, in his surplice, his

venerable face wearing much the same expression as always. His eyes rested for a moment on Gertrude as she descended the stairs, but without his usual smile of recognition.

In a moment the procession moved away slowly.

Gertrude paused for a time, awe-struck and undecided.

She had come down with the full determination of attending the lonely man's funeral, and now she lost her courage, and dared not follow. In another minute, however, she was ashamed of her cowardice; for Mrs. Leonard with her daughter passed by, each carrying a prayer-book, and moving towards the same part of the ship as the officers and clergyman.

Gertrude sped to her own cabin, and snatching, with trembling hands, her own Church Service, hastened after the rest.

In a gangway forward she found a group of persons, mostly men, some whose attendance was necessary as the officers of the ship, some drawn to the spot by idle curiosity.

Gertrude crept close to her friend Mrs. Leonard, and peering between the shoulders and heads of those assembled, she saw and heard all that was passing.

On her ear fell the solemn words:—

"For man walketh in a vain shadow and disquieteth himself in vain; he heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them."

"How truly," thought Gertrude, "those words apply

to this poor man!" They brought back to her mind the conversation she had overheard between him and Dr. Masters only two nights before. *His* riches who would gather them? The money he so cherished, and seemed so anxious to guard, what would become of that now?

There stood the Doctor himself, looking somewhat changed, but very handsome, as well as faultlessly dressed. One hand was thrust into the breast of his coat, while with the other he was nervously twisting and untwisting the ends of his moustache.

Presently there was a pause in the service, and some sailors moved about busily for a few seconds close to the ship's side. A noise of ropes and of something heavy being lifted made Gertrude's heart beat faster. A nervous movement ran through the whole group of spectators, and as they swayed this way and that Gertrude saw distinctly the *something*, which as yet had been hidden from her view.

The Union Jack covered the rude coffin, but there it was. She had just time to see it before another movement in the little crowd again hid it from her sight.

"We therefore commit this body to the deep, to be turned into corruption, looking for the resurrection of the body."

These and the words which follow came from the clergyman; then followed a sudden push, a noise of ropes against the ship's side, a splash, a gurgling of the water as if the sea hungered for its prey—and

all was over! All, save the voice of the clergyman, speaking the words of comfort:—"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours."

Gertrude, trembling from head to foot, leaned upon the arm of her friend, and moved away as soon as the solemn service was ended. Mrs. Leonard, seeing her white face and quivering lips, had drawn her arm within her own before the clergyman's voice had ceased. She feared Gertrude would faint, so pale and agitated had she become.

"Come away, dear Miss Mainwaring; it has been too much for you."

Gertrude shuddered. "It will haunt me," she said. "Oh, I wish I had not seen it. And yet," she added, after a pause, "I am *not* sorry I saw it. If I died and was buried here in this ocean, I should like to think that some friend on board would feel real sorrow, or, if nothing more, would pity my fate, and pay me this last respect. Would not you?" she asked earnestly, looking up at her friend.

"I think it matters little what is done after the spirit has fled, my dear girl, beyond, as you say, the respect due to all our fellow-creatures; and the feelings which prompt us to pity, are but natural and right."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ACCUSATION.

It was not until late in the afternon that Gertrude left her cabin. What she had witnessed in the morning had completely unnerved her, and it was some time before she could at all get over the agitation produced.

The first person her eyes rested upon on deck was Dr. Masters. He was talking to Major Darrell, the purser, and two other men. Now was her time she thought. She would wait until the party broke up, and then bravely go to him and tell what was on her mind about George Fleming's money.

In the meantime she quietly sat down upon the nearest vacant chair.

None of the party had observed her. Dr. Masters stood with his back towards her, though so close that Gertrude could have touched him without moving from her seat, Major Darrell's position made him equally

unconscious of her presence. The other three men faced her.

The purser spoke—

"It's always the case. So sure as I am driven half wild with a crowded ship, and hardly know which way to turn, somebody is sure to die—just to give me a little more to do."

"How does it affect *you* so much?" asked the young man by his side.

"Well, it affects me more than you would think. After a death among the passengers—unless there are friends on board—I have an inventory to take of all the belongings, to seal up baggage, and see that it is delivered to friends at home, if an address is to be found. Then there is a letter to be written, or a telegram to be sent, to apprise them of the death. An awful nuisance it is altogether——"

"It will not have taken very long to make an inventory of this poor devil's property," said the young man, laughing. "His wardrobe, at all events, seemed somewhat limited."

"I have heard a rumour that he was wealthy. Do you happen to know if it was the case?" asked Major Darrell.

"Wealthy! Why, he had not even proper clothes. I don't know what he may have in the hold, to be sure; but what I found in his cabin did not look like a rich man's kit. He carried a pretty good watch, and that is about all his worldly goods worth speaking of. As for

money, I suppose what he had in his pockets might, with care, have taken him as far as London after he landed."

"Ah! That shows how false reports get spread on board ship," said the Doctor.

Gertrude started. What a strange speech from the man who *knew* of his riches! Perhaps, however, it was extreme caution, used to guard the dead man's secret.

"I was told he paid the price of three berths to secure a cabin to himself. That did not look like a poor man —eh?" said an old gentleman.

"Quite true. So he did."

"And yet he had no clothes to his back—couldn't have had. No man in his senses would have gone about in all that fur such weather as this, if he had had a change. Enough to kill the man."

"I begin to think it *did*," said the purser, laughing.

"At all events, they can't be found, high or low—waistcoat or cap! So whether he ate them, and died of indigestion in consequence, or what has become of them I can't find out."

Gertrude made an exclamation. It was scarcely audible, but both Darrell and the Doctor heard it and turned round.

"Miss Mainwaring, did you call?" came from the Major.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked the other, raising his cap.

"Yes," said Gertrude, rising, and fixing her eyes upon him. "I must speak to you—alone. Will you come?"

She beckoned him to follow her, and did not stop in her walk until they both stood at the extreme end of the deck.

"That poor man's money—is it safe?"

"I beg your pardon, I do not understand you."

"The notes and bills that were in the waistcoat and cap which are lost," Gertrude said, getting impatient.

"Notes and bills! Waistcoat and cap! Really Miss Mainwaring, I—— You speak in riddles."

"You need not mind my asking about it," said Gertrude, smiling. "It is very good of you to keep his secret so well; but, indeed, you need not mind me. I am only anxious to know if you remembered the money. You heard what the purser said—neither waistcoat nor cap to be found. Is it that you have placed them in safety?"

The Doctor's face wore for a moment that expression Major Darrell knew so well, and which altered its good looks so marvellously.

"I shall begin to think it is *professionally* you want me if you continue to talk in this strain, Miss Mainwaring. May I beg——"

"Do you mean to pretend that you think I am mad?" asked Gertrude, her colour rising and her eyes flashing.

"Do you mean to say you have no idea to what I allude?"

"Not the faintest, upon my word."

"What! You don't know that that strange man died very wealthy—that he carried his money about him?"

"I know nothing about him. You, on the contrary, appear to know a great deal. You and he must have been very confidential," the Doctor said, sneeringly. "Perhaps, as you say he was wealthy, you know the amount?"

"I do—I do!" said Gertrude, a vague feeling of suspicion coming upon her. "Forty thousand pounds, or nearly. But why try to cross-question me? You see I know all about it. Why not tell me if the money is safe. It might so easily be stolen. Have you got his waistcoat and cap?"

"Have I got his waistcoat and cap! Now really, Miss Mainwaring, you must think I have a queer *penchant* for old clothes! I would not like to touch either with a pair of tongs. Very likely the steward, thinking them not worth packing up, threw them overboard. But really, what they can have to do with your strange excitement, or with the man's money, if he left any——"

Although his words were careless enough, they were uttered hurriedly, and he evaded Gertrude's eyes as he spoke. He had become deadly pale when she stated the sum the Australian had left, his brows contracted oddly in a way Gertrude had never seen before. In

spite of his attempt at jocularity, she could detect under it all the sudden shock her words had given him.

He looked up at her for a moment almost savagely, and bit his lips.

"Oh, my God!" she exclaimed. "Could you look like that without good reason? Can you have done it? Why do I feel this horror?" Gertrude clasped her hands together as she looked up shudderingly at the man she had begun to suspect.

He had denied all knowledge of the dead man's wealth—first to the purser, which she could account for; but now, to her, he had again flatly denied having any knowledge of the money.

"Tell me," she said, "before I leave you, did not the man George Fleming entrust you with a secret? Had it not to do with a large fortune he carried about him, concealed in the clothes he wore, on that very night when he died so suddenly? Did he not say he never trusted his money out of his sight? Did he not show you where the money was concealed, between the lining and the fur?"

"By heavens! Miss Mainwaring, you are attracting the attention of the passengers—you raise your voice more than you think; pray speak lower. If I should tell you I have no idea what you are driving at—if I swear I never spoke half a dozen words to the man about whom you are becoming so eloquent—if——"

"Wretch! Murderer that you are! I see it all now—all written in your face, so plainly that if an angel

from heaven were to tell me it was not so, I should hardly believe it."

Dr. Masters staggered like a man shot. He clutched at the nearest object for support, and his eyes fell before Gertrude's gaze.

She loathed the man before her; nor had she one doubt of his guilt. She saw it, as she had said, plainly written upon every feature of his face. The last thrust had been so sudden that he was struck dumb.

"I am going to the Captain," she said, "to bid him have the ship searched for this poor man's treasure. I shall tell him all I know—all *you* know—for I overheard word for word what he told you.

He grasped her wrist as if he would have broken it. He made an unearthly sound—a struggle for speech; at last he almost hissed—

"Madwoman! Stop! You dare not—you *shall not* go!"

He clutched her wrist so firmly that the pain caused her to cry out.

"Let me go, coward! It is but a matter of strength."

"Not yet—not till you hear this." He stooped and whispered, or rather hissed, something into her ear.

"It is false, it is false! Oh, God forbid that it should be true! Let me go."

"Let go, I say!" cried a deep voice in their ears; and Major Darrell's grasp was upon the doctor's arm.

Gertrude, breathless, turned with scared face to her

deliverer. She struggled in vain to speak. The objects around her became indistinct. The ship seemed suddenly to roll violently, and the deck on which she stood to sink from under her feet: the whole scene melted into a dream, and she fell heavily.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL.

THERE were others besides Cuthbert Darrell who had been attracted by the high words spoken between Gertrude Mainwaring and Dr. Masters, though no one was near enough to catch the purport of their conversation.

Ladies, who at first watched them lazily from their chairs, began to put their heads together and whisper something about the impropriety of young ladies travelling unprotected, as Gertrude was doing, on board an I. and A. Company's steamer.

"On what familiar terms the Doctor appears to be!"

"Not his fault, of course; for he is quite right to amuse himself with a pretty girl!"

"How boldly Miss Mainwaring walked him off to a part of the ship that is deserted or nearly so!" &c. &c.

These remarks, with others of a like charitable nature, were followed by—

"My dear Mrs. Parrott, it *must* be a case between

them. See how agitated they both look, how pale the doctor has become. Oh! there is no doubt about it, he is being refused——"

"How very bold *she* looks! Perhaps it is only a lovers' quarrel; for there is no doubt about it she cares for him, *that* I have seen for a *very* long time."

"There! now he seems to be urging his suit again. Don't let us appear to be looking."

Whereupon the ladies pretended to work violently for a few seconds.

Up went their eyes again and down went their hands, as Gertrude's voice, raised so as to reach their ears, made them strain their necks like cranes to catch, if possible, her words.

"How very ill-bred to be sure! She seems a regular scold; and how quiet and gentlemanly the Doctor looks, though evidently very much upset, poor man! I really shall say she is a most heartless flirt if she has refused him."

"Would you believe it?" said the friend, "He has taken her hand. Move your head *just a little*, and I shall be able to see without appearing to do so."

"Did you see that? He will not let go her hand—Hark! He said something about going mad! Poor man! how desperate he appears. I quite thought the love was all on the other side; but now it appears the reverse."

Major Darrell's attention had been attracted in the same manner, and he had certainly imagined, like these

chattering women, that he had been watching a love passage between Gertrude and his rival. Such he supposed Masters to be.

With jealous eyes he watched Gertrude's animated face; but joy succeeded the pain he had felt when, by her gestures of apparent anger, he decided that at all events their could be no love in the words *she* was speaking.

At the first movement of Dr. Masters to seize her hand, Cuthbert Darrell rose to his feet; his blood boiled as he watched Gertrude's attempt to free herself, and heard her exclamation of pain. In another moment he saw Masters stoop till his face was close to Gertrude's, and heard her again demand to be set free.

Like a tiger darting upon its prey, he sprang forward and roughly seized the arm that detained her.

Livid, and yet effecting a smile, the Doctor let go his hold, and in another minute Gertrude had fallen senseless at their feet.

CHAPTER XX.

DOCTOR MASTERS PLAYS HIS ACE.

"TAKE just a little, my dear young lady—it's a fine thing for faintness."

Gertrude had opened her eyes for the first time since she had been carried into her cabin half an hour before. Faintness was followed by hysterical sobs, and she was only just beginning to recover.

There stood before her Mrs. McGrab, holding a wine-glass with *sal volatile* and water. Mrs. Leonard and her daughter sat anxiously tending her—the former holding Gertrude's hand.

"What was it? Why are you all here?"

"Take this before you talk," said her friend; "the doctor requested us to see that you drank it."

"Oh! I remember it all now——" Gertrude shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

The name of the doctor had brought back to her wandering senses the whole scene.

"Take this, I beg of you, my dear girl. You have been over-excited, and this will do you good."

Gertrude suffered the glass to be put to her lips, but suddenly pushed it away again, without tasting the contents.

"Oh, take it away! Throw it away at once! It may be poisoned—don't touch it!"

"My dear Miss Mainwaring, calm yourself. You must have had a dreadful dream during your unconsciousness. How can this be as you say? It has come straight from the Doctor."

"That is it! That is it! Somebody throw it away before harm happens. Do you hear what I say?" she cried, addressing the stewardess.

"There—there—if you won't take it like a good dear soul, I may as well throw it away, to be sure."

"Do it before my face!" Gertrude insisted. "Throw it into the sea."

"Humour her, Mrs. McGrab; do as she asks you—anything to quiet this excitement."

"There!" said the stewardess, "it has gone."

"Thank God!" sighed Gertrude, wearily.

"I think perhaps you had better leave me alone with Miss Mainwaring," said Mrs. Leonard to her daughter and the woman. "It will be better to keep her quiet until this wandering is past."

"I am not wandering," said poor Gertrude. "It is no dreadful dream I have had—would to God it were!"

"Then, what is it, my dear child?" asked Mrs. Leonard, after the other two had left the cabin.

"Oh! if I could tell you! or that I could do good by telling you! But it is too late—too late."

"I think I can guess it, Gertrude (you will let me call you so, my dear). Only a lovers' quarrel—easily set right if you will only let me help you."

"A lovers' quarrel! Oh, if you only knew! If I could take this load from my heart, and tell you all!"

"If it will ease you and be a comfort to do so—tell me, Gertrude," and Mrs. Leonard kissed her forehead. "I have a daughter of my own, so I can feel for you, almost as I should feel for her, similarly placed."

"Never was any girl so placed before. I long to tell, and yet I dare not—not yet—not till——" She stopped.

"Has it nothing to do with love, my child? Tell me without fear, Gertrude, I can keep your secret."

"Love!" she cried; "Call it HATE!! Call it——" She stopped again, then added, "I must go to him, I must see him again at once."

"If you mean Dr. Masters, I think it would be very wrong. Nay, I must usurp a little authority," said Mrs. Leonard, smiling, and putting her hand upon Gertrude's. "It would not be prudent in many ways—the very worst thing for you, in your excited state, and calculated to draw down fresh remarks upon you. Indeed, Gertrude, it would not do."

"I *must* see him and I *will*," Gertrude said. "You cannot stop me, no one shall prevent it."

She had opened the door of her cabin and was in the saloon.

Mrs. Leonard once more entreated her to come back; but she heeded neither her nor the curious eyes of those who watched her as she passed.

She went straight to the surgery, where she stood and knocked.

The man she had come to see opened the door. He was fumbling, as she entered, among papers which looked like old letters.

"This is indeed an honour," he said sneeringly. "Sit down." He pushed the door and shut it as he spoke. "Now, Gertrude, if you are in your senses I will reason with you. First of all look at that."

He unfolded a letter, worn with time until it would hardly hold together.

"Read that," he continued, "and then, perhaps, you may agree with me that the less you talk and rave about murder, theft, and other absurd as well as insulting accusations, the better. Consider what you are about. Your grand melodramatic entertainment on deck just now was doubtless a great amusement to the passengers, always hard up for something to do and to talk about. It must have been quite a red letter day for them! But pray don't let me interrupt you while you are reading."

Gertrude held in her hand a letter written on the

thinnest foreign post-paper. The writing, faint and fine, was in a woman's hand, and so familiar to Gertrude that she started, and passed her hand over her eyes as though they were deceiving her.

"Look at the signature, and don't be a fool, Gerty!"

"Give me time—oh! give me time," she said piteously.

His eyes had a triumphant sparkle. "Well, are you satisfied *now?*" he asked, in an insolent tone, as Gertrude turned to the signature of the letter.

CHAPTER XXI.

MAJOR DARRELL'S ADVICE.

Suez left behind, the Canal got through with only three short stoppages. The last, "a bad stick"—so the sailors called it. "A little more to starboard and we should be sticking there now," an old tar remarked afterwards.

What had come over Miss Mainwaring, who seemed turned to stone since that scene on deck?

What had come over Dr. Masters? He was a new man since that same day. Always self-possessed and cheerful, he seemed now to be in exuberantly high spirits. Whatever had passed between himself and Gertrude had left him more light-hearted than he had appeared to be during the whole voyage.

Among the many who noticed this change—this remarkable contrast between the two actors in the drama—was Cuthbert Darrell. Having at his heart a longing, which day by day became more deep, more strong within him, he watched with over-anxious eyes

one of those two, and with distrust and aversion the other. Gertrude at first perplexed and then drove him to desperation; while the insolent manner and familiar bearing of Dr. Masters towards her almost maddened him. Had he not seen the man touch her arm familiarly when he demanded her attention? And once had he not (unless his ears deceived him) heard him address her by her Christian name?

The Doctor's extreme gaiety, he could detect, was forced and unnatural, his laugh hollow, while in his smile there lurked a sneer. Where he had before courted Gertrude's compliance, he now seemed to command it. She evidently feared and even loathed the man, and would shrink from his gaze, even while she tolerated his society. She was suffering some acute mental distress. What could it be? What secret power could that man have to cause such anguish to one whom Cuthbert now felt he loved better than anything upon earth?

Gertrude would watch Dr. Masters when she felt sure of being unobserved by him—watch him with her hands clasped, and a look of mute despair on her face; then, as he turned towards *her*, she would move away out of sight, sometimes to her own cabin, to avoid an interview.

What should a man do who loves, and sees the object of that love in sorrow—sees the woman for whom he suddenly discovers in his heart a passionate devotion—for whom he would give his very life—weighed down

with some mysterious burden? Over and over again Darrell asked himself this question—what could he do —how help her?

Days passed and he did nothing—nothing but suffer almost as acutely as Gertrude herself.

This could not last; he must say one word of sympathy, if nothing more, and if possible gain some little of her confidence.

He watched his opportunity. It came.

Gertrude was leaning over the ship's side, her face between her hands, much as on that Sunday morning when the strange Australian had addressed her in his own rough way.

The voice that startled her now was a softer one, the words more gentle, but hardly more kind perhaps than the well-meant sympathy of the dead man.

"Is there anything I can help you in—any trouble I can lighten—*anything* in fact, Miss Mainwaring, that you will let me try to do for you, in your trouble—as a——a brother—for a sister—for that you suffer I cannot help seeing——"

As she had started when the "Fur Man" had addressed her, so she started now, and turned her face towards him. A troubled face it was, though she strove to smile.

"No one can help me. Thank you for your kind words," she said, with a trembling voice. "I——"

"Miss Mainwaring! dear Miss Mainwaring! may I, as a sincere friend, give you a friend's advice? Know-

ing as I do that you are alone, without father, on board, or brother——"

Gertrude started; the blood mounted to her brows—"How? What advice?"

"It is this—pardon me if I am presuming—if anything annoys you, or any one intrudes upon your society to your discomfort, make it known to the Captain; for you are under his protection. If you are persecuted in the way I have mentioned, he should know it."

Gertrude's cheeks were crimson, and her eyes flashed fire, and then they dropped, as she replied—

"You must not speak to a soul of what you fancy, *not one word.* If I am unhappy, no one can help me; no one can take the load away, or undo what is done."

There was an intense sadness, amounting to despair in her tones.

"But some one might lighten the burden, whatever it is, if not remove it, by sympathy—if nothing more—" He paused. "I do not know how I dared venture to commence the subject, or why I speak thus. Forgive me, forgive my presumption. I too suffer," he said tenderly; "and as a witness of your sorrow, whatever it may be, I can bear it no longer. I do not ask you to give me your entire confidence; but if you will empower me to acquaint the Captain with what I see is telling upon your health, and making your life a misery to you, day after day—if you will let me help you *so far* I shall feel I have been of some use."

"Oh! no! no! no!" she exclaimed excitedly, "Promise me that you will not! Not a word to him, or to a soul. Do not breathe to any one, I implore you! What you have told me you fancy! You shall not leave me till you promise this."

Gertrude looked up into Cuthbert's face with appealing earnestness. No tears were in her eyes now, only a firm will, a command that he could not disobey.

"I promise," he said slowly, "I promise on my honour."

"And oh! do not question me again," she said. "If you remark anything that may perplex you, be sure that neither you nor *any one* can render me assistance or comfort me. No one! no one!"

Her voice shook and there was now such an ashy paleness on her face, which only a moment before had been aglow with agitation, that Cuthbert reproached himself for having excited her.

"Forgive me, Miss Mainwaring. I see I have made a great mistake, and allowed my anxiety for your peace of mind to let me overstep the border of friendship. Say you forgive me?"

She looked up, with something like a smile, as she answered—"You are always kind. I know you meant this kindly too; and shall I feel anything but gratitude?"

He seemed indeed her only friend, the only one, she thought, who did not shun her, since that scene between the Doctor and herself had rendered her so conspicuous,

and his familiar manner towards her had become a subject of comment.

Ladies had whispered things which Gertrude would passionately have resented had she become aware of them; but such things seldom reach the ears of the person chiefly affected by the scandal. If she fancied that eyes were sometimes watching her too curiously, even suspiciously, it mattered little, compared to her one great secret sorrow.

It had, indeed, wounded her to see her greatest friends, the Leonards, withdraw themselves partially from her society. What could have caused this? How had she deserved it?

Darrell saw and heard all. Hints sneeringly dropped by the men, heightened into bitter censure by the women, and all these disparaging whispers decided him to risk even offending the girl he so loved, if only he could give her a word of advice, or caution, or at least of sympathy.

CHAPTER XXII.

LADY DARTMOOR'S CHARMING IDEA.

MALTA—of all halting-places the most agreeable on the homeward route—was reached at midnight; the *Rungapore* leaving it again at ten next morning. Many expressed regret at the short time allowed them on land; while others made themselves happy without going on shore at all.

Coral ornaments and lace were brought on board by men who were determined to sell their wares. Asking unconscionable prices at first, they almost gave away the same articles before the bell rang to warn them off the ship.

Gibraltar, studded with innumerable gaslights along its steep and tortuous streets, looked, as the *Rungapore* steamed slowly to her anchorage, in the darkness of the night, like a huge mass of coal irregularly set with diamonds.

The weather had been perfect for some days past.

Punkas had ceased to swing in the saloons, and light clothing was no longer in favour.

Faces had brightened with healthy colour—even those of the liverless Anglo-Indian and Chinese passengers, while the spirits of the whole company had gone up ten per cent. as the thermometer fell.

There was an ominous rolling of the ship, however, as she lay with her anchors down for the last time opposite the fortified rock; nor did the glass promise well for the morrow.

The *Rungapore* came in for bad weather in the Bay of Biscay; and in the Channel, a heavy chopping sea cleared the deck of passengers in a remarkable manner. Gertrude Mainwaring revived, and her spirits seemed almost buoyant, as the sea washed the decks, and the masts creaked with the violence of the wind. Clinging to some gear about the great vessel's side, she watched the great waves roll on towards the ship, until she was warned of danger.

Major Darrell had seen her from a distance, as she stood there, her lips parted, and her face full of excited admiration of the storm.

"You run the risk of a ducking, if not a severe fall, where you are, Miss Mainwaring," he said, coming up close to Gertrude. "Let me have your chair lashed securely over there, and you can watch the elements to your heart's content, in safety."

That morning Darrell approached a subject very near his heart. He did not venture an actual declaration

of love; but gave Gertrude a pretty clear insight into his feelings. Gertrude's manner, so far from giving him any encouragement, seemed intended to crush all hope at once, and sent him away miserable.

There had been the same sadness, the same ring of mystery, in all she had said, which dwelt on Darrell's mind and tortured him, even more than his own disappointed hopes.

He spoke little to Gertrude during the few remaining days, which they spent in such close proximity; but she was never absent from his thoughts, nor was he content for her to be out of his sight.

As the ship entered the Southampton Docks joyous expressions sounded in his ears from all sides; Darrell looked on unmoved, and with a graver face than when he had embarked from Calcutta. He was almost ashamed that the sight of English shores brought him no pleasure.

It took fully half an hour to bring the *Rungapore* up alongside the wharf, on the afternoon of her arrival.

An anxious crowd of expectant friends stood watching, with upturned faces, the throng on deck. Hats and handkerchiefs were waved, and recognitions took place long before the ship touched the jetty. In the excitement of the moment exclamations were involuntary. "Hallo! there you are, Jack." "Is that you, father?" "Don't you know me, old fellow?" &c. &c. These and similar shouts were being passed from the vessel to the wharf, and back again.

Women, pale and anxious, stood waiting there; then, as they recognized some dear face among those on board, a joyous smile, like brightest sunshine, overspread each countenance, and brought the blood rushing back into the pale cheeks.

Gertrude stood, for a time, with a full heart, gazing at the scene. She had a faint hope that Lady Dartmoor might be among those waiting. She had satisfied herself that this was not the case, nor did she in all that sea of joyful faces recognize one familiar to herself. Again her loneliness made itself felt.

The excitement was becoming every moment more and more heart-stirring; and Gertrude, trembling with agitation, turned and sought refuge in her cabin.

She busied herself in collecting her scattered belongings, aided by the now obsequious McGrab.

"If there's one thing I hates, it's losing my ladies," said this greatest of female humbugs. "I always says the last few days of a voyage is terrible sad; just as I gets attached like to my ladies I must bid 'em 'good-bye,' and begin all over again with a new lot, as, not having knowed, can't be expected to think kindly on!" Here came a sniffle and a whine.

Gertrude pressed a piece of gold into the woman's hand. The effect was marvellous. Another sniffle, a courtesy, and a "Good-bye, Miss, and thank you kindly, I'm terrible grateful, I'm sure," and Mrs. McGrab was gone.

The same little acting went on in the next cabin,

resulting in another gold coin, and so on, until she had made the round of "her ladies."

The ship was hardly made fast when a letter was brought to Gertrude, whose face, as she read it, was a study. At sight of the familiar handwriting she had eagerly seized the letter and torn the envelope impatiently.

The first few lines were not encouraging, and a low sigh escaped her. Then her lips curled scornfully, and a bitter smile spread across her features. In another moment, with flaming cheeks, she threw the letter half-read across the cabin, and stamped her foot—once—twice—thrice upon the floor. What her beauty lost in softness, it more than gained in brilliancy while she was thus stirred by indignation; and if a painter could have caught the expression of her eyes and the curl of her beautiful mouth, she might have served him as a model for Margaret of Anjou, or any other scornful heroine.

One moment in anger, the next found her in tears, tears of grief as well as wounded pride.

She took up the letter once more and read it through. It ran as follows:—

"Dartmoor Park,
"Wednesday.

"My dearest Gertrude,—Judge of my *astonishment* at the news contained in your letter received by the last mail! How imprudent of you to leave your sister's house! Surely you could make allowances for a man's

bad temper, and should have overlooked what you term Major Graham's insults. I am not sure, my dear Gertrude, that he was not *right*, after all! *Really* you *should* have accepted the very advantageous offer made you, *situated as you are*. Love comes after marriage very often, if girls would only believe it, and not be so absurdly sentimental! It distresses me *extremely* when I think of your position!

"My house is full to *overflowing*, but my darling boys return to Oxford about the day your steamer is due. I shall therefore be able to take you in, and shall be delighted to see you, my dear girl, *for a fortnight*. I have a *charming* idea in my head for you after that time. You must remember my dear friend, Lady Cardamum. She is seeking some suitable *companion*, being now too old to be alone at the Grange. How would you like me to arrange for you to accept the post? Of course she is very old, eighty-six, and eccentric in some degree; but then, my dearest Gertrude, beggars must not be choosers, and I really think it would be an *admirable* arrangement, *n'est-ce pas?*

"I have Lord and Lady Carraway, the Stranges, Sir Jaspar Earle, and the Mackie girls with me; also dear Bracciane, and Signor Sparretti, who charm us of an evening with their voices.

"I have every hope that Sir Jaspar and dearest Josephine Mackie will come to an understanding before the latter leaves me. The darling girl is looking *very sweet*, though *un peu trop pale*. Sir Jaspar will be a

splendid match for her. I think I told you that he proposed last season, and the dear girl refused him. She has some absurd cousin, a lieutenant in the navy, without a sixpence, who has made Josephine imagine they were born for each other, and persists in corresponding with her. This stands in the way of Sir Jaspar. But I *think* with a little patience and firmness, it will end in the way we all so desire. She is a sensible girl, and no doubt in time will see what a position is offered her, if she accepts Sir Jaspar!

"And now, *dearest* girl, I must conclude, as I must return to my guests.

"I have desired Messrs. Cheetham & Co. to meet you at Southampton and render you *every assistance.* They will hand you a cheque from me, in case you find yourself short of money on landing.

"Your clothes, by-the-bye, must be sadly old-fashioned. Could you not manage to replenish your wardrobe, in *some* degree, before coming to Dartmoor? You see, my visitors will still be here, and naturally I wish you to make a *good appearance.*

"Above *all* things, I *beg* you will purchase new trunks before you come. I *cannot* take in Indian boxes. *I have a horror of cockroaches,* my dear Gertrude, as you know, as well as of all other creeping things. *Longing* to see you,

"Believe me,

"Your ever attached,

"CATHERINE DARTMOOR."

"P.S.—The hair is worn in a Grecian knot at the back of the head. *Pray* do not arrive with frisettes!"

Gertrude had expected blame, and had, as we know, dreaded the reception she might meet with on arriving in England. Lady Dartmoor, viewing all things as she did from a worldly point of view, would censure her for the step she had taken in leaving India, would think her most foolish for rejecting men merely because she could not love them. All this Gertrude had believed quite possible, and on this subject Lady Dartmoor would have written much the same to her own daughter had she possessed one. But to be reminded of her poverty, her loneliness, at such a time as the present! This it was that sent the blood rushing from her heart to her cheeks.

"I shall be delighted to see you, dear girl, *for a fortnight!*" This and the charming idea Lady Dartmoor had conceived for disposing of Gertrude after that fortnight had expired, first angered the girl and then amused her, in spite of the heartless way her relative concluded this part of the epistle by saying that "Beggars must not be choosers."

"Painfully true!" thought Gertrude; and she wished, oh, how she wished she was a man, and able to fight her own way in the world and be independent!

She had a vivid recollection of Lady Cardamum at the Grange, who was the subject of Lady Dartmoor's "charming idea," and on reading over this suggestion

of her ladyship's, she burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, as she pictured herself half-companion, half-keeper to a woman midway between virago and lunatic, for such indeed was Lady Dartmoor's "dear friend."

CHAPTER XXIII.

RACHEL MARTIN.

While Gertrude was thus chafing in her cabin, an old woman, with wavy grey hair and cheeks flushed with the excitement and confusion to which she was totally unaccustomed, came up the ship's side and on to the deck. Here she was hustled about in the throng of disembarking passengers, into whose faces she peered eagerly, as if seeking some one who belonged to her.

Getting impatient as well as flustered, she at length attracted the attention of one of the young officers of the ship by pulling his coat-sleeve with a jerk.

"Young man, if you have not quite lost your head like them other folks, perhaps you'll tell me which is my brother, George Fleming, as I haven't seen these thirty years?"

"I'm afraid I can't help you, old lady; but there's the purser, he is sure to know all the passengers, if it's one of them you are looking for."

"To be sure he's a passenger. Ain't you all pas-

sengers when you gets on board ship, just the same as a train? That's the what-d'ye-call-um, is it?"

She pushed her way to where the purser stood, busily engaged in conversation, and, tapping him smartly with her sunshade, she said:—

"You're the what's-it's-name, they tell me, as knows everybody on board. I'm Rachel Martin, and I'm come to meet my brother George—George Fleming, of Australia. Please to point him out, sir."

The purser was still rubbing his arm where the sunshade had struck rather painfully, and looked with anything but an amiable expression into the old woman's face. As he called to mind the name she had mentioned, however, his countenance changed, and he motioned her to the steps leading to the deck below.

Arrived at his own cabin, he went inside, inviting Mrs. Martin to follow him.

"My good woman," he said, as soon as Rachel had entered, "it is my painful duty to tell you that George Fleming died during the voyage, and was buried at sea."

"Dead!" she cried. "Not our George! You don't mean George Fleming, as was coming home from Melbourne, strong and healthy, to live with me?"

"It is the only passenger we had of the name, and I am afraid you must believe it," said the purser.

"Trouble and sorrow! trouble and sorrow! There's nothing but trouble comes to me now!" cried the woman as she sank upon the berth. "George! and he so hearty, he wrote me word!"

The tears coursed down her cheeks as she rocked herself from side to side.

"I'm really very sorry for you, my good woman," the purser said, after a pause; adding in a tone which hovered between business and sympathy, "I have your brother's effects to hand over to you, if you are his nearest relation."

"Tell me about it—about his death," she said. "Tell me how it was he fell ill? I shall be better when I know it all. Be patient with an old woman, sir, who hadn't much beside poor George to live for or look to——"

"I think you had better see the doctor, who was with him when he died. Follow me."

They crossed the deck, and passed along towards the fore part of the ship. The noise and confusion were everywhere distracting. Cabin doors were blocked with baggage of all sizes and descriptions, men shouting at the top of their voices, excited women and crying children seemed vying with each other which could make most hubbub, while the noise upon the deck above was deafening.

Arriving at the door of a cabin, which was free of all packages, and, unlike others, closed, the purser knocked. Had he waited for an answer it could not have been heard in all the turmoil and uproar, but he opened the door at once, and putting in his head, addressed someone inside.

"Doctor! Oh, there you are—attend to this old lady,

will you? She wishes to ask you some questions. It appears she is sister to that rum old bird that died on the voyage, you know. Can't wait myself, got other fish to fry. Here, walk in, ma'am," he added, drawing himself back again through the door, and making way for the woman to pass into the cabin.

Glad to escape, and really having other matters to attend to, the purser left them, and the door was closed from the inside.

Rachel Martin, scarcely raising her eyes to Dr. Master's face, spoke first.

"Oh, sir! it's about my brother George. He's dead they tell me. I can't believe it, not even now. Tell me if he suffered long, and what it was that took him off? It's very hard—it's very hard; him and me was to have passed our old age together," she sobbed piteously.

Dr. Masters coughed nervously, and his face worked as if he had been seized with some sudden spasm. He could not look into the old woman's face, but his eyes wandered from side to side upon the different objects that surrounded him.

"Your brother's death was very sudden—very sudden indeed. He was seized with a—a fit——" (A pause.) "In fact, just where you are sitting now—and died." The doctor turned his face towards the open port.

"In this very place? Where I am sitting? Oh, dear! Poor George, poor George!" she said, rising

excitedly, and going close up to the doctor, "And did he suffer much? Was it long——"

She stopped. Her hands, which were upon Dr. Master's arm, dropped to her side as if paralyzed. Her features changed as if by magic. The tears, which had been standing in her eyes, seemed suddenly to have been dried at their source. She uttered a scream as her eyes met those of the man, whom she held in a firm grip.

"Am I gone mad, or is it—it *is*—Master Ashleigh! You don't speak," she said, panting with agitation. "My boy! Master Ashleigh! Say something; don't you know me?"

That expression, half guilt, half fury, flashed into the doctor's face as he drew himself from her, almost savagely.

"What makes you not speak to old Rachel, dear?" said the old woman, now putting her arms about his neck. "You know me?"

"Hush, for God's sake! I tell you, Rachel, you must not breathe my name here. If you have recognized me I cannot help it; but not a word, mind, to any living creature. Take away your hands, like a good woman. What would be the consequence if any one came to my cabin, which may happen at any moment?"

"Oh, Master Ashleigh, dear, how can I be as if I was a stranger to you?—you as I had as my own child all those years. How can you shake off Rachel's hands as if they stung you?"

He winced. There was positive terror in his face as Rachel still made an effort to take his hands in hers.

"I am delighted to see you, Rachel, and all that —you must know I am; but—but just now—it would ruin me if my real name was known. I am Dr. Masters in the ship, remember that; and for Heaven's sake sit over there, and don't slobber me in this way."

"And where have you been all these years, Master Ashleigh, and how was it you never wrote to the poor mistress or your sisters? Tell me that. Many's the night I've stayed awake thinking of my bonnie boy, and praying God to bring you back, and then—we mourned you as dead," sobbed Rachel.

"Look here, Rachel" — he pulled out a Bank of England note from his pocket—"take this, and, like a good old soul, show your affection for me now by leaving me, before you get me into trouble. As soon as I get clear of the ship I'll come and see you and tell you all about myself and all about—*his death*," he added, hurriedly, "only you *positively must* leave me now. I have a great deal to do—and—good-bye."

He just touched her forehead with his lips and led her to the cabin door.

Rachel said not a word, but passed out, wounded by the heartless manner in which the man, to whom she had been almost mother, met her own love. Disappointed, and with temper rising, she drew within herself.

"Stop!" said Masters, in an undertone; "you have

not seen anybody you knew since you came on board, have you? No friend? or you don't think anybody has recognized you?"

"Who *should* I know? Who did I come to meet?" she asked, sadly. "Poor George, no one else; and to find he's left behind in the lonely sea. *He* had a warm heart," she added, reproachfully.

"Oh! I'm very sorry for you; it is very unfortunate. You will find that the nearest way on deck," he said, pointing to some steps, "and if I were you, Rachel, I would get out of this confounded hole as quickly as you can. I mean to do so, and I'll come and see you, without fail, very soon."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PARTING AND A MEETING.

YET another letter was brought to Gertrude before she had recovered her composure and replaced Lady Dartmoor's delicately-scented effusion in its envelope.

Gertrude had never seen the handwriting, but knew, as if by instinct, whose it was.

"*S.S. Rungapore.*

"MY DEAR MISS MAINWARING,—We part to-day, perhaps for ever. The wrench to me is such as, God grant, you may never suffer. From the first moment I saw you I have loved you with love that has kindled into passion. To possess you as my wife, to be to you what no one else may be; to soothe, console, and love you with a strong man's love, while we are spared to each other—this, oh, dearest girl! is what I ask you to put within my power to fulfil. Why is it that I hesitate as I pen these lines, with a vague feeling of

dread, lest, by thus declaring my love, I may even forfeit your friendship, while a conviction that I am striving after a prize beyond my reach, mingles with the heart-felt desire I feel to attain it? If my fears are groundless—if your answer to this letter be the reply I so earnestly plead for—then never man so blessed. Never fate—that threw us thus together—so kind. That you have some secret trouble I, who love you, know. Whatever that burden may be which steals the colour from your cheeks and the light from those dear eyes, let me accept it as my own—*our own*. Grant me the privilege of helping you to bear it; and, believe me, you are even dearer to me thus than if no cloud overshadowed you. If you cannot return the love I have told you has become part of myself—if you refuse my appeal—I will spare myself the pain, and you the annoyance, of another meeting. I await only your reply, either to leave the ship *at once*, or to meet you, as I long to meet you, as my future wife.—With dearest wishes, faithfully and affectionately yours,

"CUTHBERT DARRELL."

Gertrude kissed the letter with something like reverence, and pressed it to her heart. Then hastily she drew from her travelling-bag pens, ink, and paper, and wrote an answer. Not until this was sealed did she pause to reflect or betray any emotion. As she pressed the blotting-paper upon the address, and the

name Cuthbert Darrell, written in her own bold hand upon the envelope, came through, black and distinct upon the outside, Gertrude sighed a deep, pained sigh, which seemed the outpouring of a broken heart.

A knock came loud and sharp at the cabin door, and a man's voice spoke—

"I was to wait for an answer, Miss."

"Here it is," said Gertrude wearily, as she handed out her letter.

A few moments later Major Darrell, in the midst of the utmost turmoil and confusion, read the contents.

This was what he read:—

"My dear Major Darrell,—Pity me, as I strive for words that may not wound so true a friend. What will you think of me? You, who have done me such honour, when I can offer you in return nothing but gratitude and friendship. Never can I be too proud of having won your love; but, oh! if I could undo it, if I could make you hate me, how much better now, for I cannot be what you ask. *I can never be your wife.* If you knew all, even with the generous love you feel for me, you would not urge it. You would say I did the only thing that in honour I can do; to tell you that a gulf, that there is no passing over, separates us now, and must separate us *always.* Did I think less of you, were I careless for your welfare, I might be

tempted to accept the affection, the sympathy I so stand in need of; but I cannot betray such a noble love as yours. Better to suffer a life-long regret; better we should part. Forget me, since remembering me can bring you no happiness. Farewell for ever, and may God bless you here and hereafter!

"Yours faithfully, always,

"GERTRUDE MAINWARING."

A feeling of utter desolation took possession of Gertrude as she gave this letter to the messenger entrusted by Major Darrell to deliver his own, and wait for Gertrude's reply. The only bright gleam in the horizon of her life was now shut out by a thick veil of cloud, and she felt as if drifting helplessly from the only firm rock to which she had all unconsciously been making fast.

She saw how much she had really cared for the man she had parted from for ever.

She had not, till now, valued his unselfish nature as it deserved. She had shown little gratitude for all his watchful care during those past few weeks—sometimes had even repelled him; and now it was too late to atone, or tell him of the sorrowful regret that almost broke her heart.

His letter lay open before her, speaking reproach—so it seemed to Gertrude.

"Oh! if I could only tell him *all*," she thought;

"that he might understand what I have suffered, and at least pity me! If I could tell him what that barrier is which stands between us!"

Happily, perhaps, for Gertrude, there was no time just then to dwell upon her loss—one which she felt would be the greatest sorrow of her life.

Another knock at the door of her cabin, and she was told that the agent was waiting to attend her on shore.

Broken hearts must appear light before strangers, and Gertrude exerted herself to appear cheerful as she hurried out to meet this deputy of Lady Dartmoor.

As Gertrude left her cabin for the last time there were two people whose faces she dreaded to see on the upper deck—Cuthbert Darrell's and Dr. Masters'. Only a few minutes had elapsed since she had sent the letter to her lover; and yet Gertrude knew that when he said he would leave the ship to avoid another meeting, he intended to keep his word. Still a vague feeling of hope, as well as of fear, filled her heart as she ascended the companion stairs.

Hurrying down these, and almost coming into collision with Gertrude herself in his career, ran the man who had acted so important a part in conveying the letters between herself and her lover. He held now in his hand a note, which, on seeing Gertrude, he extended to her. It was a few lines written in pencil on a leaf torn out of a pocket-book.

"My dear Miss Mainwaring—Knowing the rush there will be, and the difficulty you may have in obtaining comfortable accommodation on shore, I have taken the liberty to secure you rooms at Gilby's Hotel. Pardon me if I have done wrong. It is the last little service I can ever offer you. I leave Southampton this evening. God bless you.

"C. D."

Then he was really gone! And his last act had been one of kind thoughtfulness for her.

Refolding the diminutive note, and placing it carefully inside the case of her watch, Gertrude followed the agent mechanically until they had gained the upper deck. A group of men, some of whom were officers of the ship, stood before her. Gertrude glanced hurriedly at them, dreading lest among the number might be the man she wished to avoid, for reasons far different from the mingled feelings which had made her dread a meeting with Cuthbert Darrell. There, sure enough, was the Doctor. He smiled insolently, and raised his cap with an exaggerated ceremony. Gertrude quickened her step as a figure advanced towards her from the group, which she imagined to be the Doctor; but which, to her great relief, proved to be the Captain. Seeing that she was about to disembark, he had come to offer his services.

"Let me see you down the gangway, Miss Main-

waring," he said, taking some shawls from Gertrude's arm. "I see you have somebody looking after you, so I hope you will be all right after that. If you take my advice you will get on shore as quickly as possible, or you will find it difficult to secure a perch for the night, unless you have done so already. Hotels crammed, I hear."

"A friend has secured me rooms," said Gertrude.

"Ah! I'm glad of it. Follow me." He conducted her through the crowd assembled at the ship's side, the agent, who seemed not best pleased at having been so long detained on board, following in their wake.

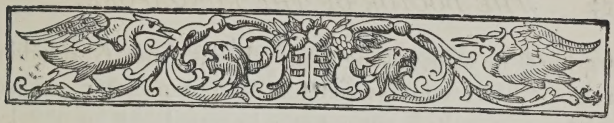
Pushing his way in a nonchalant, but very effectual manner, the Captain was soon down the inclined gangway, and on reaching the jetty, turned to take leave of Gertrude, whom he imagined to be just behind him.

Gertrude had indeed followed him closely until her foot touched English soil once more.

At that moment a face dear to Gertrude—dear, almost, as her mother's—looked into her own.

"Rachel!"

"Miss Gerty!"



CHAPTER XXV.

A CRASH.

The express for London left Southampton at 8.30 P.M. A few, not many, of the *Rungapore* passengers availed themselves of it. The sleeplessness caused by the storms of the previous nights, and the excitement of landing had been too much for most of the weaker sex. The children were tired and fretful, and a good night's rest was indispensable for them as well as for their anxious mothers. The ladies, too, must recruit some of their good looks before presenting themselves to their expectant friends in London and elsewhere. They were bound, in fact, to look their best.

Hotels were besieged. The principal one was already nearly full, two other mail steamers having arrived earlier that same day. Every available bed was in request. The most remote commercial hotel had two or three inmates, who, unable to find accommodation

where their fellow-passengers had been more fortunate, were glad to take refuge in a small inn parlour.

Those who had energy left to undertake an immediate railway journey were mostly young men who had suffered little inconvenience from want of sleep, or sensitive nerves, and who had no womankind to deter them, nor peevish children to consider.

Many of these, and among them Cuthbert Darrell, went on their way that same night, as did also the Madras trio.

In one first-class carriage are seated Colonel and Mrs. Darley with the inevitable *attaché* Mr. Mavis. They were, indeed, the sole occupants, until at the last moment, just as the whistle sounded, the door was opened to admit a gentleman.

"Hallo, Doctor! you've run it close," exclaimed Mr. Mavis.

"Why, Dr. Masters!" said Mrs. Darley, "I thought the officers remained in the ship till she arrived in the London Docks."

"Ah! but I've done with the ship and the service; I'm sick of the whole thing, and I'm off," said the Doctor.

He was dressed in ordinary clothes which fitted him to perfection, and might have come straight from Mr. Pond's own hands. At his side he wore a leather satchel, which was strapped across his chest, his face was flushed, and he had evidently been running, for he was heated and out of breath.

"Can you tell me what time we arrive at Waterloo?" he asked, addressing Colonel Darley.

"Sometime about ten, I believe, but I really do not know myself."

"How jolly to be in old England again, eh, Doctor?" chirupped little Mavis.

"If the pleasure were not marred by leaving friends we have made on board," remarked Mrs. Darley, with a half sigh; "parting *is* trying, after so many weeks of friendship," she murmured, looking meaningly at the little man.

"Ah, very likely," said the Doctor, absently.

Mr. Mavis, however, answered her look eloquently, in spite of the colonel by her side, who either did not or would not see the little indiscretions of his wife, but suffered her to carry on the most barefaced flirtations under his very nose.

Dr. Masters was in no mood for conversation. He folded his arms and shut his eyes in a very suggestive manner, thereby giving a broad hint that he did not wish to be disturbed. The lazy colonel likewise settled himself in a corner to sleep, while his wife chattered away into the ear of her admirer.

* * * * *

Suddenly a crash!—a furious hissing of angry steam!—a noise as of wheels grinding the earth!—A thunder-clap, through which appalling shrieks in the voices of men and women fill the air.

Simultaneously the carriage wherein our travellers are seated is crushed in like an egg shell. A shattering of glass!—a downfall of heated oil from the lamp overhead!—and all is darkness!

A faint cry from Mrs. Darley breaks the comparative stillness which followed:

"Oh, Ernest, help me—I cannot breathe—something holds me fast."

"I can—not. I am—d-y—ing—"

"Will no one release me? Oh God! this pain"

No answer. In that carriage she alone lives.

* * * * *

The express had dashed into an excursion train, crowded with tired-out holiday makers.

Help was near at hand, for the collision occurred close to a small station. Happily many had escaped altogether, others with only slight injuries. Officials and doctors arrived. The living were their first care; then came the removal of the dead.

The terrible business of extricating these hapless victims has to be carried on with all expedition. Fires are kindled, and, by their light, carriages are seen reared up on end thirty feet into the air.

One by one the dying and the dead are brought out from the mass of wreckage. The men who are performing this ghastly office, lower their lanterns for a moment to each face, and then carry their burdens to a bank hard by, where they are laid side by side.

Cuthbert Darrell, who was travelling alone in a compartment near the end of the express had been thrown violently from his seat and stunned by the concussion. On recovering consciousness, he found that he had not escaped without severe bruises, while acute pain in his left shoulder rendered him for the time unable to move. He soon recovered sufficient strength, however, to free himself and assist others, disregarding his own bruises in view of that terrible amount of human suffering.

He, with many others equally unselfish, worked hard through the darkness of the night.

Men, women, and children—what a terrible list! Who shall paint such a picture and give it its full extent of horror!

Old men, whose white hairs speak of three score years and ten, have not escaped a violent death at last.

Women, whose lives are lost, while their children escape unhurt.

Children, whose parents would gladly lay down their own lives in exchange for theirs.

One young child Cuthbert Darrell brought from amidst the heap of wood and iron, looking as if he slept. The colour had not left his cheeks, and a happy smile lingered on his face. There was no injury in sight, no disfigurement to mar the chubby baby features; and yet, like so many, he was quite dead.

Cuthbert bore him gently to the bank and laid him there, but lingered, watching in the vain hope that his sleep might prove less deep than he feared, and that he might breathe again.

Just as Darrell, sad at heart and weary with bodily fatigue, had turned to leave the spot, three men, bearing a lifeless form, laid their burden down beside the little child, and moved away.

A strong light from the fires on the bank above fell upon the face. Darrell started. There, handsomer even in death than in life, lay the man of whom he had been jealous—the man he had begun to hate.

Was it fancy, or had his mind become weakened by the horrors of the night? What made him think of Gertrude's face as he bent over the marble features of the unfortunate man?

In death the likeness was so strong that Cuthbert Darrell stood aghast. Then in a moment there flashed upon him a suspicion—nay, a certainty. He had guessed half poor Gertrude's secret.

He viewed with suddenly changed feelings the lifeless form at his feet. He pushed aside the hair from the forehead and from around the mouth, and the marvellous resemblance to *her* unmanned him.

An exclamation escaped his lips. "Her brother! Oh, Gertrude, what is the mystery that seals your lips?"

That it was Gertrude Mainwaring's brother, if ever

flesh and blood could speak, Darrell felt now satisfied. How to tell her? How spare her the pain of seeing him as Cuthbert Darrell saw him now?

An official came up and addressed him in an undertone; both were awed by the surroundings.

"Beg pardon, sir, but is this a relative of yours?"

"N—o," stammered out Cuthbert Darrell; "but I know who he is,"

"His name, please, sir?" asked the man.

"Masters," Darrell said, mechanically. "Dr. Masters, of the steamship *Rungapore*."

The man wrote it down in a book he carried.

"You don't happen to know to what address he was going?"

"No."

There may be some letter or paper here that may tell us," said the man, touching the satchel which the dead man wore. "Will you look, sir, while I hold the lantern?"

Darrell did as he was told, instinctively. He pressed a spring and the bag flew open. From it he took a roll of papers and handed them to the railway official.

"Bank notes, sir, but no address."

There was another tightly rolled packet of papers. Cuthbert took these out also, and passed them on to the man.

"More money, but no address, that I can see. Why, sir, this is a fortune! Stop a bit."

The man held one of the thicker papers close to the lantern. "You said the name was Masters; here is a name, but it is not that."

Darrell took the paper from his hand. It was a Bill of Exchange for a hundred pounds, payable to "George Fleming."

He gave back the paper, repeating the name to himself slowly as he did so. "George Fleming!" Where had he heard that name lately?

"There seems nothing but money here," said the man, rolling up the notes and other papers, and replacing them in the bag.

In the pockets of the clothes were a railway ticket for Waterloo, a watch, the glass of which was broken —but the watch itself still going—some loose coins and a handkerchief with the initials A. M., and this was all.

"George Fleming!" The name rang in Cuthbert Darrell's ears. Was it in India, or later on board ship that he had heard it? A passenger's name it might have been.

"Have you any instructions to give?" asked the man, bringing him back from the past to the present.

"None. Stay—yes! Let him be removed to the nearest inn. I will go myself and make necessary arrangements. The money and other property you had better take charge of."

"It is a large sum, sir, the gov'nor had better have it at the office yonder."

"I'll come with you to the station master."

They unstrapped the bag and took it from the dead owner, as well as the watch and other contents of his pockets. Having seen these consigned to safe keeping, Darrell next superintended the removal of the unfortunate man's crushed remains to a temporary resting-place at the inn.

Then, wearied as well as suffering, he threw himself upon a sofa in the room allotted to him, under the same roof, and sought sleep, if such a thing were possible.

He lay with his eyes shut, indeed, but sleepless; first, Gertrude, as he had seen her last, haunted him, then that terrible scene on the line—the little child's face, followed by the Doctor's, then Gertrude's again, after that the name "George Fleming" associated both with the Doctor and Gertrude. Thoughts chased each other through his brain, disconnected at first, but becoming each moment clearer, more startling, until the truth burst upon him, and suspicion ended in conviction.

"George Fleming!" That was the name of the Australian whose sudden death had so affected Gertrude! What then?

"Great heavens! Is it possible? Oh, Gertrude if it be so, no wonder you have suffered!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

WAS IT MURDER?

NEWSPAPERS were full of the catastrophe upon the South Western Railway. The accounts were terrible to read; but falling far short of the reality.

Darrell had sent telegrams to his own friends, assuring them of his safety, giving the best account of himself he could, and telling them not to expect him until they saw him.

The fact was he was really ill, and had been obliged to consult a medical man. The over-excitement of brain caused by the accident, and subsequent discoveries had deprived him of rest, added to which his strained shoulder caused him now great pain, and he was advised to keep quiet where he was, a few hours longer at any rate.

He would not have followed this advice, but would have pushed on, unfit though he was for travelling, had not another and stronger inducement detained him.

It was the hope, nay, the certainty, he felt that Gertrude Mainwaring—as soon as the accident became known to her, with the names of the victims—would come to that very same house. She would be sure to see the accounts in the morning papers, or the news would reach her in some other way. After the discoveries of last night Cuthbert could not doubt but that she would come at once, and he must not leave the place until he had seen her.

Would she give one thought or feel a moment's anxiety for Cuthbert's own safety after the greater shock had lost its first overwhelming power? She would guess that he was in the train.

Darrell dared not count upon this, and yet, now that he knew so much of her dreadful secret, many things that had seemed inconsistent in her conduct towards himself, were explained. She had refused him, it is true, but in doing so she had admitted that she more than liked him. She was all that was noble, brave, and good; perhaps she was loving him all the time. She had hinted that there was something which would not bear the light—something that she could not divulge—and yet to accept any man while she had a terrible secret undisclosed—that too might well be impossible. As Darrell turned all these things over in his mind his heart beat faster, and hope took the place of despondency.

Late that evening the sound of wheels beneath the window drew his attention.

It was a fly which had stopped as the inn door below. Cuthbert was just in time to see the driver shut the door of the conveyance with a bang, jump on his box, and drive away. Then came a sound of feet upon the stairs, and of women's voices; by-and-by the footsteps passed Darrell's room door, and he heard the landlady saying,—

"You're welcome, I'm sure, if the room will do; but we never was so pressed. My son won't mind turning out for a night or so, in such a case as this; but what's to be done with the young lady I haven't a notion. It isn't fit for such as her to sleep in."

"If it's only tidy and clean that's all she'll care for, poor lamb; and it's little we'll sleep, either of us. I couldn't leave her the night through if there was fifty rooms."

"Then I'll just show you the best we can do. Mind the step, ma'am; that's it." They passed.

Darrell was down the narrow stairs in an instant, and in the dingy inn parlour.

There, pacing the floor with faltering steps and a scared look upon her white face, her trembling fingers nervously intertwining, was poor Gertrude.

At first she did not seem to see him; her eyes were fixed vacantly before her, and a faint moan escaped her as Darrell came hurriedly forward.

For some seconds neither spoke. Cuthbert had taken both her hands in his.

"Miss Mainwaring! Gertrude!"

She tried to speak but could not. Nothing was heard but the same sound—half sigh, half moan.

"At such a time as this let there be no restraint between us," urged Darrell. "I implore you not to drive me from you!" for Gertrude drew her hands away from his and shuddered, while her tears fell fast.

"You are safe, thank God for that!" she whispered. "You do not know why I am here. If you did——"

"Trust me—you may do so. If I do not positively *know*, still I have *guessed* much—more than you think. But come, we will not talk of it now, you are faint and weak, you need rest and refreshment."

"Tell me what you know—what you have guessed—oh! quick—quick!"

"Must I — must I now—to-night?" He paused, dreading his task.

She signed to him to go on.

"If it must be, then listen. On that terrible night I assisted, with others, in the sad task of ministering to the living and extricating the dead. Among others your ——, Dr. Masters, was carried close to where I was standing, and laid at my feet—— Why in death a likeness should have been so strong, which in life I had failed to observe, I know not; but as I looked down upon him, your own face seemed——"

"Oh, stay!" cried the poor girl. "You know who he was. You know it was my brother. Yes, yes—he was."

Darrell took her trembling hands once more within his own. "You cannot bear this—— indeed I dare not tell you all; it will be madness to go on."

"Yes, tell me all. Anything but this suspense," she said, her whole frame quivering.

"I was asked if I knew your brother. I said I did, as an acquaintance. Then I helped to search for some address that might discover where he was journeying. Nothing was found—nothing, that is, but an enormous sum of money in notes and bills. Some of the papers bore the name of——" Darrell stopped. He had watched anxiously the effect of his communication upon the poor girl. As he was about to mention George Fleming's name she put out her hand with a deprecating gesture.

"You shall not hear the name. I would not have grieved you thus much if I could have helped it. But," added Darrell, "now I have told you: you will not wonder that a sudden light was thrown upon what, to me, had been a mystery before. I guessed at once the truth, Gertrude."

"You cannot know the *whole* truth! You do not know the worst! You cannot, or you would never speak to me like this. You would not touch my hand or be my friend if you guessed the awful secret."

"Try me," said Darrell. "You can trust me now, surely, Gertrude."

"His sudden death—in that cabin—so soon after he had spoken of the wealth he carried! Must I say more? Can you not follow me to the greatest sin?" She gazed into Cuthbert's face till it grew as white as her own.

"*Not murder,*" he said. "Oh, not *that!*"

It was the first time he had been brought face to face with this most awful suspicion respecting the dead man, and he could not conceal the shock she had given him. He had, it is true, guessed that a shameless robbery had been committed by the Doctor, and that a mystery existed besides, in which Gertrude was mixed up. What that mystery was he partially discovered on the night of the accident. The thought had flashed upon him that Gertrude had known of the theft and was bound to secrecy by her brother.

This alone was quite sufficient to account for her unhappiness, and for all that before had tortured him; but this—this darker and more horrible suggestion! Surely Gertrude was wrong. His mind refused to receive it.

"Dismiss this terrible suspicion," he said. "What proof have you? Think, why should your brother have done this deed? He could not have known of George Fleming's wealth. The man hardly spoke to any one, and would, of all things, be most reticent about his riches. Your brother might, after his death,

have found the money upon him, and been tempted; but could have had no knowledge of it previously."

"Oh! But he *did* know! indeed, he did know!"

"How—what reason have you for this?"

Gertrude looked around the room, now becoming darker as night closed in. She spoke in a frightened whisper.

"Because, with my own ears I heard him tell my brother, on the very night of the——that he died. Hark!" she said; "I hear them coming—I have not dared to tell *her* yet—the old servant, Rachel Martin, who is with me—she is George Fleming's sister!"

Darrell drew back. She had given him another shock, and he could not recover himself.

"You shrink from me now," Gertrude said sadly. "I told you that if you knew *all* you would not urge me to become your wife. Did I not warn you? I dared not do more—not then. I could not betray him. I——"

"My darling girl, I shrink from you! Do you imagine then that love such as I bear you is to be turned from its course because the loved one suffers—suffers for the sins of others—not her own? Oh, Gertrude! if I started it was because your words electrified me—for the time. *Shrink* from you!" he said, folding her to his breast.

Poor Gertrude! her terrible secret was told at last. She had kept nothing back, not one cruel detail, even

though she fancied each word would drive further and further from her the man she had learnt to love so well.

There was a step outside. Darrell, kissing the weary head that lay upon his breast, released Gertrude just as old Rachel entered.

"Come, Miss Gerty, dear. There's a tidy place upstairs; not a room fit for you if things were as they should be, but it's clean and comfortable. Come," she said, coaxingly; "try to get some sleep, and I'll sit by you, as I used to do when you were a little one."

The poor old servant had forgotten her own sorrow, now that Gertrude needed her love and care. If she could but get her "child" to eat and sleep a little she would have time enough to think of "poor George" through the long night that was before them.

As she approached Gertrude, to lead her away, her eyes fell, for the first time, upon Cuthbert Darrell. In the dusk she could just see his figure, not far from where Gertrude stood.

"And may I ask, sir, what you do here?" she said, sharply. "I thought Miss Gerty was alone. She needs to be left without intruders such a night as this. It's strange you shouldn't see the trouble we are in, and leave us to it. It's not for strangers to stand looking on!"

"Hush! Rachel dear," said Gertrude. "This is no

stranger, and this, you know, is not a private sitting room——"

"But such a night as this!" persisted the old nurse, "it's unbecoming in a stranger."

"He is a friend—a true friend that has stood by me in all my griefs—in all the disgrace——"

"*Disgrace!*" shouted Rachel. "Who dares speak of disgrace, child——?"

"Oh, Rachel, dear, you do not know, and yet you must be told—I have a harder task before me than I dare to think of—and you—what will you say, my poor Rachel!"

"What does the child mean?" said the bewildered woman, looking first at Darrell, then at Gertrude. "What makes her talk like this?"

Darrell was silent and avoided her eye. Gertrude, silent too, moved towards the door, making a sign to her old nurse to follow her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BESIDE THE DEAD.

They ascended the rickety stairs and wound their way along narrow passages, then through a room, and into a yet narrower and darker passage beyond; Rachel lighting the way, while she led Gertrude by the hand.

"Stop, Rachel!" — Gertrude held her back tremblingly.

"But this is the room, dearie; we are just there," said the old nurse, pushing open the door of a long, narrow apartment with a sloping ceiling, the beams of which almost touched their heads as they entered. It was barely furnished, but cleanly, and had it been a room in a palace they would not have felt one whit the happier this night, absorbed as they were in the stern reality of sorrow.

"I cannot rest here," cried Gertrude. "I must see *him*. Oh! where, where is the room? Take me, Rachel. Have you seen him?" she whispered, clinging to her with a terrified look on her young face.

"I have, dear," said Rachel Martin, calmly; "I have seen him, I have kissed his pretty brows and smoothed the soft curls that used to be so fair!—so fair!" Her voice broke, and she turned away her face.

"Take me to him, Rachel."

"Not to-night. If you go into that room now, all sleep will be taken from your eyes—all sleep for this night—and you must not do it, darling."

"I could not rest without seeing him! Don't prevent me — oh, let me go, Rachel, — show me where——"

"You can bear it?" asked Rachel.

"I *must* go, and I will try to bear it," Gertrude said hoarsely. "I am his sister—can I forget that? Can I be under the same roof, and go to rest without looking upon his face in death?"

Then those two women retraced their steps along the passages, back through the empty room, and down the stairs.

Rachel turned the key in the door on the right of the staircase and pushed it gently open. Gertrude clinging to her arm, pale as death itself, walked firmly towards the centre of the room.

They crept nearer to the low pallet on which *it* lay, the faint flare of the candle scarcely making the darkness around less deep. Gertrude shuddered and a low cry escaped her. Only once before had she been brought face to face with death. Then it had

been the peaceful fading away of her gentle mother, about whose death-bed there was nothing to shock, as in the untimely end of this wretched man. The one had been the joyous release of a pure spirit—this the awful summons of an unprepared soul.

The fitful light of the candle Rachel held, fell upon the marble features, the changeless brow, and shone upon the curly hair around the face of Ashleigh Mainwaring.

Gertrude stood motionless as a statue, with lips parted, wrapt in contemplation; she seemed the living image of the dead brother upon whom she gazed.

Then her breath came quick and fast—her bosom heaved convulsively, till a hysterical sob burst from her, and she threw herself beside the man for whom natural affection still pleaded.

She drew Rachel down beside her.

"Forgive him—say you will forgive him, Rachel—you *must,* now that he is dead. Oh, Ashleigh!" she sobbed, "she will forgive you—she will!"

"Forgive!! and what am I to forgive my boy?" cried the old woman. "He never injured me—not to do me hurt. He used to love me! Thank God there was a time he used to love me."

"Look at him! Look as he lies there! You could not curse him, even had he done you a great injury. You would forgive him. Say so, Rachel, darling!

You would not disgrace our name—you would keep the secret, even if he had deprived you of money! Oh! Rachel worse than that! if he had robbed you of your own brother! Speak; say, 'I forgive Ashleigh all the wrong he ever did me, from a little child even until now.'"

Gertrude had thrown her arms around the old servant's waist and clasped her tightly, while making this passionate appeal. Slowly her head dropped upon the other's lap.

"Disgrace! Forgive! Child, you scare me, and I cannot understand your talk. You're crazy with grief, my darling. I told you what it would cost you, coming here to-night; it is not fit you should have come—it is killing both you and me. Come, come away; your white face tears my heart to look at—I cannot bear it," whined old Rachel.

But Gertrude clung about her so that she could not move. The room resounded with the girl's sobs, as she still entreated Rachel's forgiveness, and spoke again of disgrace.

Rachel Martin became frightened at what seemed to her the rambling of a fevered imagination. She strove, however, to command herself, saying reprovingly—

"Hush! hush! It's not for a Mainwaring to talk of *disgrace*, Miss Gerty. You must not go on like this—I cannot listen to it. Come away!"

"I will be quiet, I will, and tell you all. It must come. Oh, Rachel, listen!"

Then, in a strained voice, broken by sobs, and by the terror of revealing her brother's sin to that faithful friend and servant, Gertrude told all.

As she had spared herself no pain when confessing it to Darrell, so she kept no cruel detail back now.

At the first shock Rachel had sprung to her feet, and pushed Gertrude from her in horror. She was beside herself with grief and abhorrence. She looked with angry eyes upon the man who had done this wrong, and who lay past her reproaches.

A conflict was raging within her, which, though it lasted only moments, seemed of hours' duration to Gertrude, who dared not move, but watched her with breath suspended. She longed for Rachel to speak, if only a word—and that of anger.

Presently tears began to course down Rachel's cheeks, and she slowly shook her head.

"I'll not believe it, I can't think he'd sink so low in sin. Not that he took the life before he took the money. But if he *did*,—then, O God, forgive the boy his grievous sins! and I—I will pray to think less hardly of him, I will try to forgive him too, in time —in time."

Gertrude clung to Rachel's skirts. "Oh, do not hate me, Rachel, because I told you! I've borne the weary burden of it all these days and weeks, little thinking

that he was your own brother. If I had known that, oh! if I had known *who* he was, I should never have dared to look you in the face again!"

Rachel sank into a chair and put her hand gently upon Gertrude's head, but could not speak. She bent down and kissed her forehead, and Gertrude once more buried her face in her lap.

So they sat for some minutes. The candle spluttered in its socket, making the light more fitful, and the scene more ghastly.

At length Gertrude softly raised her head, and, taking both Rachel's hands in hers, kissed them tenderly.

"For my sake—for his—now that he lies before us cold and beautiful in death—say you forgive him, Rachel! Think of the days gone by—of our mother!—If not for our sake—oh, then, for *hers* forgive!"

Her beauty, perhaps, never bore such poetry along with it as at this moment.

Rachel felt its power, she saw a look of that mother of whom Gertrude had just spoken so sacredly.

"Bless you, my dear, dear child. Come, see what I will do for *her* sake—and—for *yours*."

She rose and tremblingly approaching the bed; she stooped—lower—lower, until her lips rested upon the stone cold brow; then making room for Gertrude, she gently pressed her down towards the corpse.

The poor girl, completely exhausted, body and mind, bent over the bed and kissed the face not paler than her own; but the ordeal had been too terrible—a shiver ran through her frame, and she fell forward in a dead faint.

* * * * * *

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ASHLEIGH MAINWARING'S EARLY LIFE.

ASHLEIGH MAINWARING'S father died in the prime of life, just as his practice had become the largest in Torchester, and his skill as a surgeon had won him the confidence of the neighbourhood, and justly so, for his talents were of no ordinary range.

Courted by society, almost worshipped by his patients, Dr. Mainwaring possessed none of those qualities which conduce to domestic happiness.

Selfishness, indifference to the feelings of others, blended with a certain fascination of person and manner, were the most striking traits in his character. In these points Ashleigh resembled his father *in toto*.

Strange as it may seem, women love such men with a more passionate devotion than they ever give to worthier objects. So did Mrs. Mainwaring love her husband, with an infatuation that is so common, so inexplicable! Seldom did an approving smile or kind

word repay her for all her self-sacrifice. When such came, it was to her like water upon parched land.

Sensitive and fragile, reared with all tenderness in the lap of luxury, she shrank beneath the harsh tones and coarser nature of her husband, and would tremble while she loved, even more than ever, the man who so little appreciated her.

Dr. Mainwaring's affections—if he possessed any—were centred in his profession. To do him justice, his heart was in his daily avocation. It interested him, and his increasing fame flattered his vanity.

He died from the effects of blood-poisoning, by accident, during an operation, just when life seemed most dear to himself, most useful to his family.

Ashleigh was just seventeen at the time, Florence (Mrs. Graham) a child of ten, while Gertrude was a fairy-like being of six summers, a mere baby, and the plaything of the house.

Mrs. Mainwaring, stunned by her sudden bereavement, was at first unable to rouse herself, to face the consequences, and realize the reverses to herself and family.

Dr. Mainwaring had lived beyond his income, which was large enough, had he been commonly prudent, to enable him to save much. He had speculated and lost; but this he never confided to his wife. As time modified her grief, and brought her calm reflection, the widow strove to form some plans for the future.

It was then, for the first time, that she discovered the deplorable state in which her husband had left his affairs.

Her house had to be given up, her carriage, her maid—things which all her life she had looked upon as common necessaries. All these were resigned without a murmur. If only she could continue to educate Ashleigh—her idol—as his father had determined his son should be educated—*this* was her absorbing anxiety. She would stint herself that this might be accomplished; Ashleigh must have every advantage, every chance of success in life.

So resolved Mrs. Mainwaring, and her son was sent back to the same public school as heretofore.

Three months later the head master of that school wrote a short, not unkind, letter to Mrs. Mainwaring; but broke to her the fact that she must remove her son.

Ashleigh had, in fact, disgraced himself. His case had not been quite grave enough to merit a severe public punishment, but he had just escaped being expelled.

Here was a fresh blow—grief accompanied by disgrace!

Mrs. Mainwaring carried the letter straight to Ashleigh's truest friend, next to herself—that friend was Rachel Martin. Rachel had lived in Dr. Mainwaring's family before her marriage, and on the death of her

husband, to whom she had been married but a year and a half, she came back as nurse to Ashleigh.

A rosy-faced young woman, with honest eyes, was Rachel in those days. She loved the children under her care as though they were her own, but was true to her first love—the boy Ashleigh.

His imperfections of character had not weakened her affection for him, although the faults were such as made her tremble. Once he had robbed Rachel's workbox of some shillings. The nurse grieved over the sin, but did not condemn the sinner, and screened him from his father's wrath by keeping the theft to herself. This, and many like secrets, she had to keep from her master, but told them all to Mrs. Mainwaring; hence the confidence between the mistress and servant.

"Send for the master's brother, ma'am," said Rachel, after hearing the letter which distressed her mistress. "Mr. Frank Mainwaring has got his head put on the right way. He'll tell us what's best to be done. Master Ashleigh don't mind us women; he wants a man's sharp eye over him, and a good talking to, before it's too late."

Ashleigh's uncle was summoned.

The young culprit seemed somewhat subdued by his ignominious dismissal from a public school, and made great professions of repentance. His uncle took him to London, where, by his own choice, he commenced studying medicine. His subsequent career may be

stated in few words—the fewer perhaps the better.

He walked the London hospitals; passed first-rate examinations, in spite of his wild life: spent his mother's money, and, more than that, ran headlong into debt. Again the services of Mr. Frank Mainwaring had to be called into play. Though not a rich man, he was able to set his good-for-nothing nephew once more upon his legs. Ashleigh Mainwaring next entered the army as assistant-surgeon. The regiment went abroad. At Singapore racing became his great amusement, coupled with play. The regiment had a name for gambling of all kinds, and Ashleigh did his best to keep up its character, passing his idle hours almost entirely in this way.

A heavy loser on one occasion, he made a desperate endeavour to retrieve his ruined condition by cheating at cards. The victim, a young ensign of the regiment, would not have detected the foul play had not an older man, a looker-on, discovered and brought it to the light. Again, by the skin of his teeth, did our clever young friend escape public scandal. He sent in his resignation, thereby preventing an *exposé*, and sailed for Australia.

Here he struck out a new line. Naturally gifted as an actor, he had constantly performed in London as an amateur. He now turned this talent to some use. A fellow-student finding himself at a Melbourne theatre

one night, was astonished to recognize in the popular actor Charles Mostyn, no other than his chum of former days, Ashleigh Mainwaring.

For two years he had ceased to correspond with his family. His mother had gone through the anguish of waiting for news from the far country, but in vain. Then came despair—and, lastly, the news of his death.

Finding his creditors had traced him as far as Melbourne, this ingenious rascal caused his death to be solemnly inserted in all the leading papers, thereby obliterating himself from their books, and preventing further inquiries from being instituted.

Tired of theatricals, and hankering after his profession, he once more changed his name—this time to Masters. He practised for some time in the neighbourhood of Sydney, in partnership with another young surgeon, and having real genius in his profession, he made himself quite a reputation, his partner (who, nevertheless, was the hard worker) being left out in the cold.

Growing sick of the colony, this "rolling stone" managed, by a fluke, to be appointed surgeon to one of the Insular and Asiatic Company's vessels, an unexpected vacancy having occurred just as the ship was about to sail. He had been some years in this service, before his meeting with Gertrude, and his own violent death.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Major Darrell's Narrative Resumed.

WHY it should fall to my lot to write on subjects eminently distasteful to me, reminding me, as they do, of my most miserable experiences, seems hard perhaps; but as the happiest event in my life resulted from these trials, I cannot refuse to contribute a few more pages to this volume as a thank-offering. Nor, as I am aware, could any other than myself explain some important circumstances connected with this story.

I attended the inquest and funeral of Ashleigh Mainwaring. The love I bore his sister overcame the repugnance I felt to the man as I stood by Gertrude's side at his open grave.

The property found upon him at the time of the accident on the railway, was handed over to Gertrude as his nearest relation in England—only to be given to Rachel Martin, the real heiress of the rich Australian (whose money it had undoubtedly been). The formality had to be gone through of writing to India

for the sanction of Major Graham and his wife, Gertrude having no power over any property her brother was found possessed of at his death without such sanction.

To do Major Graham justice he gave up all claim to any portion of the money on hearing the details of the case, which had to be told for Rachel's sake. The faithful nurse left Dighton with Gertrude on the evening after the funeral.

Before we parted, I had taken Gertrude to my heart as my future wife.

To accept Lady Dartmoor's invitation cost Gertrude many a heartburning, but it had to be done; and she travelled there accordingly, knowing that in a few short weeks she would be out of reach of her ladyship's impertinent patronage.

Rachel Martin accompanied Gertrude to Dartmoor Park, uninvited, for she declared "Miss Gerty wasn't fit to hold her own against that owdacious woman, who liked to be Mrs. Uppercrust over everybody. No, she should go and see her child safe at all events, and give 'my lady' as good as she gave, if she showed any airs to the child."

This good woman does her best to dispel from Gertrude's mind the horrible suspicion of murder having been really perpetrated upon her brother by Ashleigh.

"Money was always his snare—the boy might steal—

he may have robbed poor George; but I'll not believe *that other!* No, not that. The boy could never sink so deep in sin. If I—George's own sister—won't believe it, then you, child, as Master Ashleigh's, surely *you'll* try and doubt it too. Drive it from your mind as old Rachel will, God helping me."

So argues Rachel; and so, in other words, I endeavour to cast a doubt upon the awful question of Ashleigh Mainwaring's guilt, when Gertrude speaks of the sudden death of the Australian.

And not without reason.

There had been ample proof of the theft, but none of murder, beyond Gertrude's conviction of her brother's guilt, caused by the man's sudden and horrible change of countenance and gesture which followed her accusation.

It was possible that his knowledge of having committed the robbery was sufficient to cause this rage and terror when he discovered that Gertrude knew the secret of the "Fur Man's" wealth, and suspected him of stealing the enormous sum of money.

Our arguments at first seemed useless; but lately Gertrude has promised to dwell more upon the *doubt* than upon her previous conviction.

CHAPTER XXX.

MAJOR DARRELL MAKES HIS BOW.

About the last thing in my thoughts as I embarked for England on board the *Rungapore* was *matrimony*.

Men of my regiment had chaffed me a good deal on my confirmed bachelor habits and distaste for society. The night I left Gurrumbad I was clapped on the back with—

"Well! Good-bye, old fellow. Make the best of your two years at home, and bring out a wife—of course you'll do that."

My answer had been, "Thanks, much obliged! but I'm not a marrying man. I never saw any woman yet who, in my opinion, came up to my own sisters, and until I do I shall remain as I am. Now, as I fancy the piece of perfection I seek is not yet born, I can promise you all not to change my state."

I spoke as I felt. My admiration for my own womankind—beginning with my mother (God bless her memory) and descending to my sisters, both mothers

themselves—was unbounded. If I was ever in love it had been a most fleeting, transient emotion, and had never cost me one sleepless night, or interfered one whit with my digestion, always perfect, even in Bengal.

What will our fellows say when they hear that so soon after making them a grand harangue on the subject of my single blessedness I am not only deeply in love, but married? Married to Gertrude Mainwaring, of whom I may well be proud, who absorbs my every thought, and in whom centres my every hope for the future.

Much against Lady Dartmoor's wishes (who would have liked our wedding to have been the excuse for gathering her fashionable acquaintances around her), Gertrude protested against anything but the simplest village wedding. Her views met mine entirely, and on the brightest summer morning, when all things animate and inanimate seemed, like ourselves, rejoicing in the sunshine, we two were made one.

We are visiting Gertrude's step-grandmother for the first time since our marriage. The house is crowded with guests, male and female. Her ladyship is in her element. Not only has she the handsome *bride*, whom women ever view with double interest, but myself, the *bridegroom*, to introduce to her friends and toadies.

We are getting accustomed to being "trotted out" for inspection. We bear it as well as can be expected —bear being lionized, patronized, and petted as well

as we can. It cannot last for ever, which is our comfort.

We know exactly how to value the demonstrations of attachment which Lady Dartmoor lavishes upon us both; and Gertrude says, not ill-naturedly, but from a thorough knowledge of the old lady, that we owe our high favour to her own personal attractions. This sounded somewhat vain, but my wife laughed a merry laugh, and said—

"Why! we are neither of us so very uninteresting, you see. My voice is not *quite* cracked yet, and amuses her friends after dinner; while my Cuthbert does not look *very* unornamental in her drawing-room!"

I am not sure she did not kiss me after this playful speech.

"So you think that if one of us squinted, and the other had an impediment of speech, her ladyship would not be quite so fond of us, eh, Gertrude?"

"She would not have asked us at all," laughed Gertrude. "I know Granny Dartmoor so well, and I feel that we must take some credit to ourselves if we are the fashion with her."

Gertrude is right. I think I see through the dowager; she is proud of my wife, of her beauty and noble nature. There may be *some* womanly affection blended with her admiration for Gertrude; but the latter predominates.

In myself she finds a light-hearted, able-bodied aide-

de-camp. Being brimful of happiness and content, I am willing to make myself agreeable to her guests, and promote conversation at her dinner-table.

We cannot help comparing this visit with one we lately paid in Somersetshire.

There, in her native village, a quiet hamlet, lives Rachel Martin, and there we spent three thoroughly happy days with her. My wife coaxed me into taking her to see the good old soul, who was in the seventh heaven of delight at our visit.

Rachel has bought herself a cottage with fine old-fashioned fruit garden, and paddock for a cow, and she has a pretty neat-handed maid to manage such things as appertain to a dairy; while Rachel herself potters about her poultry yard, and watches the gradual fattening of her pigs with more interest than could have been expected.

The cottage is furnished according to her own frugal ideas. She has no fancy for grand things. *Something* she must do with poor George's money, that she is resolved, something that will make others like herself—free from the dread of poverty in old age.

She has consulted me upon the best mode of carrying out this wish. We held a council, Rachel, Gertrude, and myself, the evening before we left the village to come here. It was unanimously decided that George Fleming's sister should build and endow almshouses with the wealth that had so strangely become her own,

that the buildings should be called by his name, and should be no mean monument to the dead; but that the whole sum (deducting only what would bring her in sufficient income to live always as now) should be devoted to this good object.

Our visit, I say, to this unselfish old servant gave us more pleasure—a thousand times more pleasure—than all the grand entertainments our fulsome relative heaps upon us here, and we sigh for the freedom of those days, and the sincerity of old Rachel, as we experience the hollowness of society at Dartmoor.

THE END.

Stirling, October 1885.

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